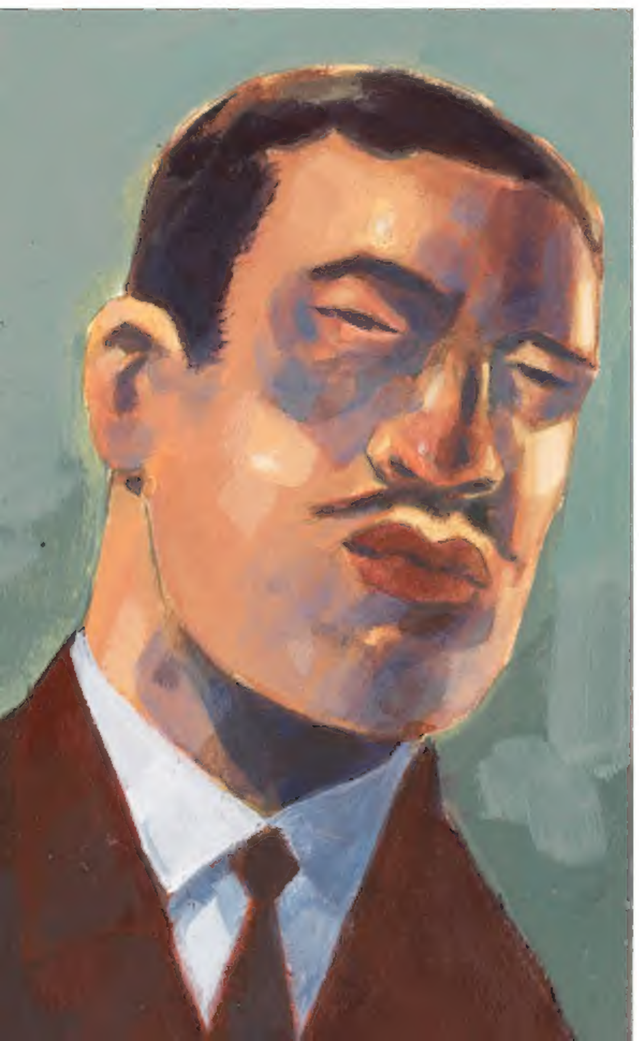
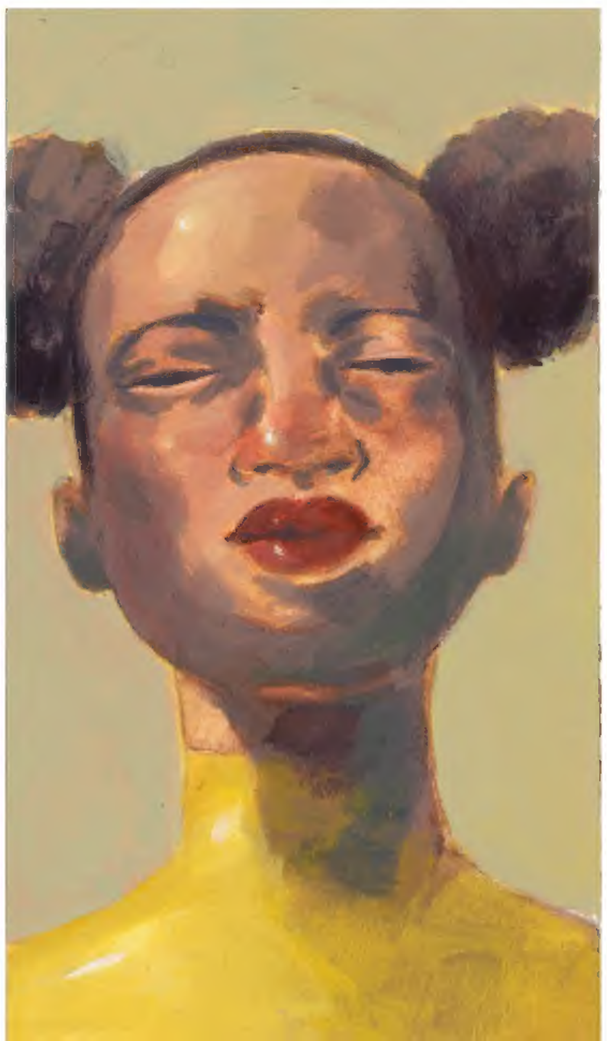
THE WORLD OF BLACK HAMMER™

BLACK HAMMER '45 AND THE QUANTUM AGE

JEFF LEMIRE RAY FAWKES MATT KINDT WILFREDO TORRES

DAVE STEWART SHARLENE KINDT NATE PIEKOS MARIE ENGER TODD KLEIN





ON *BLACK HAMMER '45*:

"*Black Hammer '45* is a great addition to the Black Hammer universe. The writing will grab readers from the beginning."

—Adventures in Poor Taste

"[*Black Hammer '45*] is an inaugural chapter that will assuredly add more complexity to the overlapping, interconnected Hammerverse."

—DoomRocket

"The Hammerverse continues to expand with an exciting new miniseries that is refreshingly different from other entries."

—Multiversity Comics

ON *THE QUANTUM AGE*:

"Boasting a diverse cast of characters (and inter-species romance), sly moments of humor, and smart scripting, this fast-paced saga chock-full of heroes puts a fresh spin on familiar themes of rebellion. It's a welcome tour through an entertaining sci-fi universe in the vein of Mike Mignola's Hellboy comics."

—Publishers Weekly

"*The Quantum Age* expands the *Black Hammer* legend in thoughtful, resonant fashion."

—Doom Rocket

"Jeff Lemire joins forces with Wilfredo Torres and Dave Stewart to bring us another superhero masterpiece set in the *Black Hammer* universe, one thousand years in the future."

—Impulse Gamer

"Jeff Lemire sets up a fascinatingly human story about superheroes who have watched their world descend into a place they no longer recognize. Torres's art is engaging and is an excellent addition to Lemire's words."

—Women Write About Comics

"Lemire and team prove to us once again that this universe extends beyond the *Black Hammer* series by creating a book with familiar imagination and wit while terracing new territories."

—Multiversity Comics

THE WORLD OF BLACK HAMMER™

THE WORLD OF BLACK HAMMER™

LIBRARY EDITION VOLUME 2

BLACK HAMMER AND THE QUANTUM AGE

BLACK HAMMER '45

STORY BY **JEFF LEMIRE** AND **RAY FAWKES**

SCRIPT BY **RAY FAWKES**

ART BY **MATT KINDT**

COLORS BY **SHARLENE KINDT**

LETTERS BY **MARIE ENGER**

CHAPTER BREAKS BY **MATT KINDT, VERONICA FISH, GLENN FABRY** WITH **ADAM BROWN, DENYS COWAN** AND **DON HUDSON** WITH **NOELLE GIDDINGS,** AND **SANFORD GREENE**

THE QUANTUM AGE

WRITTEN BY **JEFF LEMIRE**

ART BY **WILFREDO TORRES**

COLORS BY **DAVE STEWART**

LETTERS BY **NATE PIEKOS OF BLAMBOT®**

PROLOGUE LETTERS BY **TODD KLEIN**

COVER BY **WILFREDO TORRES** WITH **DAVE STEWART**

CHAPTER BREAKS BY **WILFREDO TORRES, CHRISTIAN WARD, ANDREW MACLEAN, MARCO RUDY, BRENDAN MCCARTHY, TULA LOTAY,** AND **JEFF LEMIRE** WITH **DAVE STEWART**

BLACK HAMMER CREATED BY
JEFF LEMIRE AND DEAN ORMSTON

COVER BY **DEAN ORMSTON**

DARK HORSE BOOKS

PUBLISHER MIKE RICHARDSON COLLECTION EDITOR DANIEL CHABON COLLECTION ASSISTANT EDITOR CHUCK HOWITT
DESIGNER ETHAN KIMBERLING DIGITAL ART TECHNICIAN JOSIE CHRISTENSEN

BLACK HAMMER '45
ASSISTANT EDITORS CHUCK HOWITT AND BRETT ISRAEL

THE QUANTUM AGE
ASSISTANT EDITORS BRETT ISRAEL AND CHUCK HOWITT

To find a comics shop in your area, visit comicshoplocator.com.

THE WORLD OF BLACK HAMMER™ LIBRARY EDITION VOLUME 2

Black Hammer '45™ © 2019, 2021 171 Studios, Inc., and Dean Ormston. The Quantum Age™ © 2018, 2019, 2021 171 Studios, Inc., and Dean Ormston. Black Hammer™ and all related characters © 171 Studios, Inc., and Dean Ormston. Dark Horse Books® and the Dark Horse logo are trademarks of Dark Horse Comics LLC, registered in various categories and countries. All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the express written permission of Dark Horse Comics LLC. Names, characters, places, and incidents featured in this publication either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), events, institutions, or locales, without satiric intent, is coincidental.

This volume collects the complete series *The Quantum Age* and *Black Hammer '45*.

Facebook.com/DarkHorseComics

Twitter.com/DarkHorseComics

NEIL HANKERSON Executive Vice President • TOM WEDDLE Chief Financial Officer • RANDY STRADLEY Vice President of Publishing • NICK McWHORTER Chief Business Development Officer • DALE LaFOUNTAIN Chief Information Officer • MATT PARKINSON Vice President of Marketing • VANESSA TODD-HOLMES Vice President of Production and Scheduling • MARK BERNARDI Vice President of Book Trade and Digital Sales • KEN LIZZI General Counsel • DAVE MARSHALL Editor in Chief • DAVEY ESTRADA Editorial Director • CHRIS WARNER Senior Books Editor • CARY GRAZZINI Director of Specialty Projects • LIA RIBACCHI Art Director • MATT DRYER Director of Digital Art and Prepress • MICHAEL GOMBOS Senior Director of Licensed Publications KARI YADRO Director of Custom Programs • KARI TORSON Director of International Licensing • SEAN BRICE Director of Trade Sales

Published by
Dark Horse Books
A division of Dark Horse Comics LLC
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie, OR 97222

DarkHorse.com

First hardcover edition: August 2020
Ebook ISBN 978-1-50671-999-3
Hardcover ISBN 978-1-50671-996-2

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed in China

BLACK HAMMER '45™

BLACK HAMMER '45™

We do what we're supposed to do. Don't we?

God gives us our **path to duty** and it is our job to recognize it. To do **Right**. OR so they say.

Even if we no longer **believe in God.**

Even if we've lived **too** long and seen **too much** to believe.

The first notes of the warm horns barely come through. This old record is scratched up to Hell, but I do still love it.

It's an **original.**

We were originals.

Once upon a time, we were the world-famous **Black Hammer Squadron** fighting the greatest battles in the **world.** We were the ones who stepped up when evil loomed.

At first the newspapers didn't want to make a big deal of us, 'cause of the color of our skin. But eventually they said we always gave as good as we **got.**

Forgive me, but they were not quite **Right...**

We always gave back five times what we got.

We were the terror of the Nazi machine. Not the Liberty Squadron. Not the Red Tide.

Hammer Hawthorne and his Black Hammer Squadron. We were force of nature.

We destroyed the dreaded Nachtwulf patrol. There were the newsreels where people cheered in the aisles. They knew what the wolves had done to our boys.

On land...at sea...in the air. We did it all. The press liked to say we were dauntless, always daring.

Always upright—

Hmph.

Yes, yes. This is the day. I know.

I never forget, do I?

No, of course I don't.

And your water. Yes.

Hmph.

Well I have to do it, don't I? Who else will?

Just listen to those trumpets, hmm? Lovely sound. Lovely music. Until I can put you outside. It's still cold.

HONK BEEP BRRR HONK BEEP HONK BEEP

Shit.

I remember...

HONK HONK

THAT'S A HELL OF A NOISE COMING FROM ALL THESE ENGINES, JP!

QUEL DOMMAGE, HAMMER! WE CAN FIX THAT!

TAKE THIS DAMNED BEAST DOWN AND KEEP IT THERE! LONDON WILL BE SAFE AT LAST!

BOOM

GODVERDAMMNT!

Vas ist--

John Paul! Let it fly!

Oui!

RIP

RIPP

Phew! We're not out of trouble yet, Hammer!

I see it. Let him get a little closer, I'll pop 'im.

Just so he shouldn't pop us **first**, non?

Golden Gail! Crazy little glory hound!

I knew **she** was gonna be here, I coulda stayed home and watered my prize **azaleas**. She probably wanted to do this whole job herself!

HAH!

Mon Dieu! What next, Hammer?

Next were the laboratories of the **Sturmhexen**, who sought to turn the very forces of nature against Allied troops.

We made short work of them one summer night, while the skies screamed to be released from their bloody-minded influence...

Next were the **artillery lines** at Bastogne, to give the men of the American 101st and 82nd Airborne some **relief**.

YAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!

We roared through the Ardennes like men possessed...

Next were the **Drachenkriegers** and their train.

We destroyed the beast's mystic trainers while the **Horseless Rider** broke the Cruel Monster of the Northern Skies against the granite face of the Alps.

And next...and next, and **next**...for three **years** we fought, ceaselessly, valiantly, counting **victory** after **victory**.

Until the next mission was the one that would be our **last**. On April of nineteen forty-five. Three weeks before the end of the War in Europe.

All right, fellas. I know you all are hearing the good news from the front and writing home to yer one-and-only, tellin' her how you'll be back fer the Podunk Spring Dance!

But listen up! This thing's not over yet! We got a deep-six mission down from Top Brass. You hear me?

You take it in, you get it done, then you **bury** it! This one's gonna go in the "never happened" folder!

Let's get started. Over here, we've got the objective elevation...

Hammer, is there a "never happened" folder? That doesn't seem like a good idea...

Yeah, JP, Major Thompson keeps it at the bottom of his latrine.

Ah, you mean where Cook gets our Sunday breakfasts.

Hah. Add a little butter and it's just like ma used to make.

Well, **your** ma. After I—

Hey. Pay attention, huh? I'm trying to listen.

You done yappin', Captain Hawthorne? JP? Li?

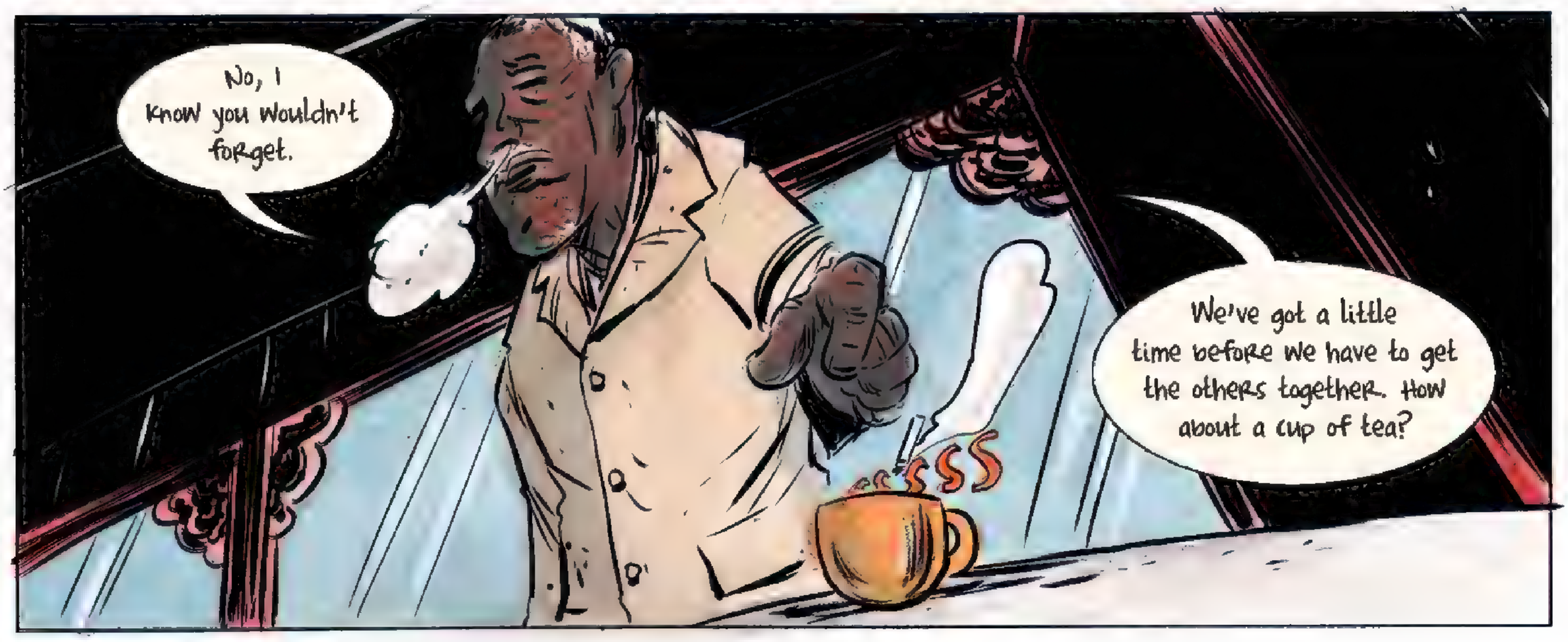
You boys ready to hear about yer mission? Seeing as it's you all who'll be doing the drop an' riskin' yer **heroic** asses?

Sure thing, Major, let me just get this lit.

Hey! No smoking!
Hey! We're not open yet! Not till lunch!

Relax, Li. It's me.
And you won't be opening today at all, will you? It's the tenth.
Oh. Captain. How am I supposed to recognize you all the way over there? Come in, come in.

I know what day it is. You think I don't know? My daughter will run the place today.
I have some flowers. To bring. You think I'd forget?
You better put that cigarette out before I put it out for you.


No, I know you wouldn't forget.
We've got a little time before we have to get the others together. How about a cup of tea?

I was just thinking about the Major.

Remember him?

Ah, "Texas Thompson." Yes, I remember.

He was always **yelling** at you, like a schoolteacher. I used to wonder if he would hit you with a **ruler**, across the knuckles. Bad boys!

We'd have deserved it.

Whatever happened to him?

Don't know. Last I heard he made his way up to General, working in the Pentagon. That was sixty-five, sixty-six. Then nothing.

Maybe he went in the "never happened" folder.

snort

Okay. Good tea. Good talk.

Where to first?

Black Hammer Squadron, your objective is an unnamed prison camp justa few klicks east of Vienna. No **name**, because it doesn't **exist**, y'get me?

The boys in intelligence tell me we have eyes on a **family of interest** inside that camp--scientists, real eggheads, too smart for the Krauts to kill...

...even if they're itchin' to. Name of Greenbaum. Husband, wife, and son. Got them working on some interdimensional mumbo-jumbo, I don't know. Stuff nobody else seems ta be able to figure out.

Now listen. The **Russkies** are makin' their Vienna advance--they'll be on top of the place lickety-split. And the Krauts aren't gonna want to let 'em have 'em. Command wants the Greenbaum family and their crazy math, fellas, and they got shiny new American papers waiting for 'em. They want 'em for something they're calling Project "Weird." Say they need what's in their **skulls** to make it work.

The Krauts won't kill 'em and the Russkies won't get 'em. Why? Because **you're** gonna extract 'em for us. You're gonna bring 'em home before the Russians do. Right?

YES, SIR!

This is too simple a job for us. There must be more to this.

Here it comes, non?

Now, this mission won't be no **picnic** in the **park**...

We got a sky hound telling us that the **Red Tide** is vanguard on the Russkie advance.

You catch **their** eye, you **know** you're in for a real how-de-doo.

Hammer? Do I have your attention? Because **these** days, where the **Red Tide** goes, we find...

The Ghost Hunter.

Ahhh...**shit**.

Hammer. You have to keep your **head**.

Are you listening to me?

I am the one who is carried away with emotions, yes? You always tell me to stay **calm**.

Now I am telling **you**.

Hammer. The Russians are our **allies**. Who cares if they capture these scientists, yes? We can **bargain** with them.

This is some--how you say...

...some "stripe happy" officer looking for a last-minute chance to make **promotion** before the war ends.

Listen to me.

The Major **owes** us.

He will cancel this mission if you ask him to. OR give it to someone else. Liberty Squadron, where are they? OR the Beast Patrol, even them.

Everything checks out, fellas. You're good to go.

What's with JP? Looks like he needs his brown pants.

New mission. We might face the Ghost Hunter.

Ah...**shit**...

Load up, fellas.

No time like the present. We're fueled up and ready to go.

Get in, I'll drive.

You can't see across the room to figure out who I am but you still drive? You're ninety-two years old.

We could take the bus.

What are you, my daughter? I like my car.

I see fine. It was dark in there! Mood lighting!

If you were thinking about Major Thompson then you were thinking about the mission. Weren't you.

The last one.

Of course.

What else would I be thinking of today?

I know you.

Seventy years later you're still beating yourself up about it.

Every mission we went on was a risk. And we all knew it. You think anybody blames you?

It wasn't your fault, what happened. None of it was your fault.

It was my fault.

There was plenty to fear in the war.

And we'd seen it all. We were the **Black Hammer Squadron**, and **nothing** touched us...

EEEEEE

...until we met "der Jägergeist."

The Ghost Hunter.

ATATATATATAT

The man in the **all-white Stuka**.

The deadliest pilot in the history of the world.

More than 850 kills were credited to him.

Including **Captain Jack Flag** and his sidekick, **Bulldog**...

...and the **Atlantic King**...

...and **two** of the original **Black Hammer Squadron**. Two **before** that last mission.

Oberst Klaus von Löwe. Born of old Austrian nobility. Second son of the greatest flying ace of the First World War, though he blew through every one of his father's records in just a few months.

Nobody could fly like this man. Nobody could kill like this man.

He was unreal.

Intelligence said that he had a seat at every table, was offered every honor, lavished with money and property and fame...

...And he didn't give a shit about any of it.

They said that he didn't relish all the killing he did. Strange...

...because it seemed to be all he wanted to do.

And he did it every single day. Nothing slowed him down.

Our side, we tried everything to stop him. Air attacks. Assassins. Super-assassins.

Where?

E-east of Vienna, Herr Oberst...

Nothing worked.

He just kept on coming.

Without pause. Without mercy. He'd started the job with the Black Hammer Squadron and he swore he'd finish it before the War was over.

The Ghost Hunter **hated** us.

But the only people he hated **more** than us...

...were the **Red Tide**.

Soviet Experimental Mechanized Unit 006, under the command of Guards Senior Sergeant Aleksandra Nazarova, a.k.a. the "Avenger of Stalingrad."

Nobody even knows how many military kills her unit accounted for. **Thousands**.

And then there were the **civilians**.

In a straight march from the motherland to the Rhine, they flattened **everything** in their path. If the Ghost Hunter was a stiletto, never missing his target...

Nazarova was a flamethrower.

Comrade. Our scouts report fugitive infantry inside the church, hiding among civilians there. They cower before us.

We can send in a ground unit to separate them from the people and--

No.

No time. We sustain the march to Vienna.

CLICK

EUROPE

Understood, Comrade.

They were heading west...

...and we were heading **east** on our collision course.

I'll hitch a ride on a transport, stay close in case you need me.

Not this time, GRIPS. We're good.

Got news today--we won't be going to the Pacific. War's over for you, and after this mission it's over for us too.

But Captain!

No buts, old friend! You get yourself on **home**, now! I'll see you **Stateside**!

Godspeed, Captain Hawthorne...

I know you got **doubts** about this mission, JP.

I do, Mon Capitaine. The war is ending soon. We've made it so **far**. I don't see why we should be taking a risk like this...

It doesn't matter if the war ends **tomorrow**, my friend. This is **today**. We have our **duty**. It was never just about **winning** the war. It was about all the people out there we're **fighting** for--and all the people back **home**.

It's about their **future**...everyone's future. And if there's a family down there that we gotta bring home--if they'll make some kind of difference for our side...

You understand? Come Hell or high water, we do our **duty**.

So this is duty. This has **nothing** to do with the Ghost Hunter. The man who killed **both** your **brothers**.

We go there and we rescue this family and we **leave**. We take no **unnecessary** risks. Right, Hammer?

Hammer?

And so, at **dawn** on the tenth of April, we took to the air. And of course, we were not the only ones...

...did the **others** know what tragedy this cruel day would bring? Did the Ghost Hunter feel it in his Stuka, as I did in the cockpit of my Black Hammer Special?

Did the drivers of the Red Tide feel it as they sweated in their great steel-hot machines of war?

OR did they, like us, think only of their mission? Did they, like us, push aside fear and leap...

...leap into the inescapable grooves of our fate...

...cut by God, or chance, or nothing at all...

...from which, once the leap was made, there was no turning away.

Nothing's ever easy, is it?

Look alive, fellas...

...we got ourselves a little border guard.

BLACK HAMMER '45™

IF I'M GOING TO *HELL*...

WHAT EVIL LURKS IN THE **HAUNTED SKIES?**

THEN *YOU'RE* COMING *WITH* ME!

GEORGE FREY
•2018•

Will his Royal highness be Riding with us today...

SPIRAL

ASYLUM

...or will you be taking to the air, Wingman?

Very funny, Captain.

Thanks for picking me up at work.

BIP!

Can you lower those big wings?

Li here needs to see out the back.

Hmph!

...so then he said we outta put it where the sun don't shine and everybody looks at Captain Night, see, and he just kinda... well see, it was, haha--

--you hadda be there to really...

...I tellya that Die Fliedermaus mighta been a sick son of a bitch, but he could really fly. They clocked him once at two-hunnerd miles per, scout's honor...

...'course if he wasn't that fast I'd never have ran him into that train so hard his head ripped clean off...

...worst chow I ever ate in my life, but I wasn't about to say anything. I mean, here I was, meetin' the Queen of England and I...

Enough! My God!

We said we'd give you a lift, but you promised we wouldn't have to listen to all of your greatest hits again!

Every year it's the **same**! On and on and on! The Liberty Squadron **this**! The Horseless Rider **that**!

You're **everything**! We're **nothing**!

This isn't your day!

How—

How's the **family**, Li?

Good. Really good!

My daughter, she runs the restaurant better than I ever did! And my grandson, he plays the piano like **Mozart**!

You know what they say...

"...nothing but blue skies."

KRAKOOOOOM

DIE!

DIE BEFORE THE FURY OF THE MASTER RACE!

Near Wurzburg. 500 km to target.

A GOD? A fucking GOD is fighting for the Nazis?

Hammer, we need to get out of here!

Stow it, JP. That's no god.

It's a Sturmhexen trick. One of their **cloud shapers**, looks like, hooked up to a—

—lightning generator.

KRAAKKOOOM

Li, focus fire on the cloud. Dollars to donuts they're hiding in there.

Yes, Captain Hammer.

BRRR

RA TA TA TA TA TA TA

We'll all take it. Crossfire, three ways!

Hit it!

That's it!

That's done it, boys!

Wahoo!

Li, we better land, have a look at that damage.

Yes, Captain. I am flying without instruments.

Heh. It was **foolish** of me to think it was a **real** god, non? For a moment there—

Anybody can fall for a good **trick**, JP. I've seen that kinda thing before.

Your rudder is burned **through**. I'm surprised it didn't lock up.

The whole thing was super-electrified, **that's** why your panel went crazy. We can bring it all back.

You think?

How long?

Two or three hours.

No good. We drop twenty **minutes**, we could lose the whole ball game.

Li, you stay here and get your plane back in working order. We'll fly ahead to the target. Assuming no trouble, we should be at the landing point in a couple hours.

You can meet us there afterwards.

Captain—

I don't want any lip. I don't like splitting up, but—

"—the clock is ticking and we don't know how much time those folks have **left.**"

Undesignated prison camp, east of Vienna.

[Everything! Gather everything! Quickly!]*

*Translated from German

[Not a **shred** must remain! Gather everything we need! Everything we don't can **burn**!]

[The enemy cannot find a single equation! Nothing!]

[They must be close.]

[**Russians**, you think?]

[I believe so. But I suspect we will not see them, my love.]

[Quickly, quickly!]

[Now shoot these filth.]

[Goodbye, Mr. and Mrs. Greenbaum.]

BA-BOOM

BOOM

[What do we do?]

[They...papa, they...]

[Run!]

Nngh...

[Kill them...I'll do it myself...]

[This way!]

[Do you think you can run?]

[There is nowhere for you to run! You are mine! Do you hear me? Your time...]

400 km to target.

["...your time is up!"]

Not long now, Captain.

Looks like our boys are taking **Nuremburg** down there. Overran the train lines...that's it for the German escape route...

Good.

Hell of a **fight**. I heard the Liberty Squadron is on the front line, helping General Patton out.

Captain.

Two o'clock. Do you see that?

It's too small to be a plane.

Maybe a superhuman. Get ready on those guns!

You said the Liberty Squadron was here. It could be Captain Night, or Doctor Andromeda

Can you see? Is that one of ours or one of theirs?

CHRIST!

EVASIVE ACTION, IT'S--

Hammer! You're—

KREEE

Goddamn it-- Dead stick. Got no engine--

HAMMER!

Hammer, answer me!

RATATATAT

Fucking Nazi Bat--

Just got to bring it down--

My engine's gone! He's toying with us!

Captain, can you hear me? He's coming around again! Watch out!

Oh you, dirty son of a bitch...

Ahahaha!

[You're dead, Hawthorne!]*

[I'll eat your corpse!]

BLAM BLAM BLAM

PING

*Translated from German

[Do you hear me?!]

I hear you, asshole!

RRRagh!

WHOK

KRAK

Ach!
[I will kill you!]

[You have no chance!]

KRAKK

WHAMM

THOOOM

KABOOOM

No! JP!

No, goddamn it! Not like this!

JP! JP!

Oui, mon Capitaine?

You called?

I only wish I could've seen the look on your face.

Do you think he's dead?

Haha! Nice play, Frenchie. You always did have a flair for the dramatic.

Let's make sure he is.

GET DOWN!

KEEBOOM

Artillery. I think our boys are playing fish-in-a-barrel with this train here.

Forget die Fledermaus. We gotta get over to the Allied lines, see if we can rustle up some kind of transport.

Agreed.

KEEBOOM

Dog Company, you're with me! Advance to Point Charlie! On the double!

Nuremburg falls tonight!

Hey, it's Hammer Hawthorne.

Hammer!

Hey, Hawthorne, you got time for an autograph?

Oh hey, the movie stars are here. Where'sa makeup trailer?

Sergeant. Can I trouble you to point me towards the CP? I'm going to need to talk to your Commanding Officer.

Sure thing, Captain. No trouble at all.

You see the way me an' my boys are headed?

Well you just turn yourself around and head the way we ain't.

You'll find the rest of the commissioned officers there, an' a cushy place to rest your pretty ivy-league bones, too.

Howsat sound? Sound nice?

That fool. He mocks you?

If he knew what we've been through, he would get down on his knees--

Take it easy, JP...

...I'm sure they've seen just as much as we have.

And they're about to see more. Krauts're dug in all over that city. Some of those boys might not be coming back tonight.

CHK-CHAK

There we go. Find ourselves a ranking officer and we're back in business.

You boys are about **250 miles** off the mark. What happened?

Die Fledermaus happened, Major. He's still somewhere out there on the field, near that train your boys are using as target practice.

If you killed him, Wingman's gonna want to have a word with you. He's been hunting that bastard for **months**.

I didn't have **time**. Just left him there.

Now listen, Major. This here is a letter straight from General Eisenhower himself.

It instructs any Allied officer to provide me with whatever I need on this mission.

Top Priority.

I see.

What do you need?

I need **transport**.

And I need the fastest **driver** you've got.

Hmm. I know just the **guy**. He'll getcha there lickety-split.

You might even **know** him.

Gentlemen,

Meet
ABRAHAM SLAM.

BLACK HAMMER '45™

Рядом то оно.

IF YOU MESS WITH THE BEAR...
YOU WILL GET THE TEETH!

COWAN
HUDSON

Spiral City. Now.

Well, fine, then. You don't want to hear about my war stories?

Why don't you fellas tell me one of yours for once?

I read about the Black Hammer Squadron but it's not the same, right? Reporters with all their spin, GI Paper propaganda. Not the same at all.

Austria, April 10, 1945

"It's not the same as someone who was there."

Didn't take the Germans too long to notice us, eh, Hammer? Took 'em another twenty minutes to build up the sand to take a run at us, though!

We got about eighty miles to **Vienna**! How many of these guys you think are gonna throw themselves at us between here and there?

BLAM BLA

I think they've seen your newsreels! Abraham Slam, America's HERO!

I figure the answer...is all of 'em!

You think you can shake 'em?

'Course I can, Captain.

But why not do one better?

BRAP

BRAP

BRAP

BRAP

BRAP BRAP

Take the wheel.

Got it! But--

Mon Dieu! He's not going to--

SPANG

SPANG

V-IPPP

John Paul! Wingline overshoot! You're three, I'm nine!

BLAM BLAM BLAM

Ready, Captain!

Is that all of them?

There were six.

Two for you, two for me, one for Slam--

Two for Slam.

Not bad, fellas.

Ha! You're something **else**, you know that? Abraham Slam. I always thought the **stories** about you were pure **bullshit**.

Just doing my part, Captain.

Just doing his **part**.

I wish we had a **hundred** like this guy.

Captain. We only need **one**.

He should do the mission.

The papers are going to report that he did it anyway. Now that he's with us. The great white hero.

No way, JP.

Don't be **insane**! He'd walk into that camp and come out without a **scratch**! You know it!

For him, it's **nothing**! Against normal soldiers? It's a game!

For us--

Stow it, JP. That's enough chicken shit.

You're a **Black Hammmer**. We do the job we're **given**.

Say, fellas.

I don't know if you saw, but those popsicle Krauts we just put down--one of them peeled off before we started dancing.

KRRRRRR

I saw that. We should be expecting company--

RRRRRR

You know, I always had a lot of **respect** for you Black Hammer fellas. You stood up, even when the reg'lar army didn't want ya. Just cause of the color of your skin.

Hell, we were in the air together enough. You saved **my** ass a couple times, and I sure saved **yours**.

Shit, Who's **counting**?

But I tell you something. Abraham Slam let slip that he rode with you **once**, and then he clammed right up. Never said another word about it.

Old **Abe**, he'd **never** say a bad word about anyone if he could help it.

I know he wasn't any kind of **racist** so I always figured you did something that pissed him off--

You **figured** that, huh?

Well I figure you can stick it right up your--

RATATATTATA
RATATATATATAT

[We're doomed! To live through all the Germans have done-- to see them steal our research just to--]

[No! Look--]

[They're killing the guards and sparing the prisoners!]

[They must--]

<Halt. Stay where you are.>*

[--want us alive...]

<Comrade Nazarova. I believe I've located the Greenbaum family.>

<Excellent. Secure them and-->

[--what's that sound?]

*Translated from Russian

EEEE

BOOM

[God help us!]

[Aarrrgh!]

WHANNNNGG

[Quickly! We have to get out of this madness!]

[Mama, papa, it's falling!]

BOOM

[This way!]

[It'll be much safer away from the camp!]

[Not so fast, Doctor Greenbaum. I have my orders.]

[You're coming back to Berlin.]

<Unit 3, locate and acquire our objective! Find the Greenbaums!>

<Units 2 and 5, engage the airborne enemy with me! Switch weapons to ZILANT Configuration!>

<NOW!>

CLICK

EEEEEEEEEEEEEE

RATATATATA

PING

PING

KAPWING

WHRRRRRR

KACHIN

KACHIN

CHNK

EEEEEEEEEEEEEE

KHANGG

FFFFFFFFRAAAAA

<DIE, NAZI SCUM!>

[God in Heaven!]

[I SAID FIRE!]

I said don't stop, Slam! These Krauts have nothing to do with our mission! We gotta catch up to that flying bastard!

BLAM

If we drive away they'll pick us off like a turkey in a field!

We can take 'em, we just gotta--

Hammer, listen to him!

You are Americans, Ja?

We are the last of the 298th Infantry Division, 2nd Panzer Army. We wish to surrender to you. Before...

...Before the Russians come for us...

Slam! You have to take us to Vienna!

We don't have time for this! Fuck these Krauts! Your orders--

These boys just issued a formal **surrender**. You know the protocol.

And I'm **not** leaving them here to die.

I doubt you'll find any more trouble on this road. Vienna's **that** way. Give 'er all she's got and you'll be there in half an hour.

"**Protocol.**" Piece of **shit**.

"Costumed Hero." Just another candy-ass boy scout glory **hound**. Gonna walk those Krauts back to the line and get himself another **medal**.

While we're still **fighting**.

Check the **weapons**, JP. Make sure you've got the **skyhook**.

The Ghost Hunter's there ahead of us, but maybe Nazarova will keep him busy. We get there in time, we'll have us a real **festival** on our hands.

Oui, Mon Capitaine.

We could have used Slam's help, Hammer.

Yeah, and it'd be **nice** if we had our planes and some **artillery** and maybe a traveling **circus** to keep our spirits up, too.

We got everything we need, buddy.

You, **me**, and all the **lead** we can carry.

Just like it's always been.

[Niemann is down!]

[Nazarova can fly! She can fly, fuck, she crushed him right in the cockpit, she--]

[Calm yourself. She's riding sixty tons of metal.]

[I doubt she can pull that trick more than once.]

[Concentrate fire on her.]

KA-BOOOOOOOM

[Show these Russians that their great Steel Avenger is nothing more than a bitch in a flimsy deathtrap.]

Jawohl!

BOOM

[Do you have her? Verify.]

[I can't see. The smoke...]

[Cannot verify, repeat, the target is obscured.]

[And what's happening over there, hmm?]

[Cannot verify. Coming around for another pass.]

[What are you interested in, hmm? You in the woods.]

[Target is-- target is not down, repeat, target is NOT--]

BO BOO

OOM

BOOM

RAA

BOOM

Aaaaa!

Ach!

[Lower your weapon!]

[Do you know who this is? He's a very valuable scientist! They both are!]

BLAM!

[I am prepared to bar--]

Monika!

[No more. No more.]

<Do you speak Russian?>

[Russian? No. German...a little English?]

Ah...English. You are safe now. Climb inside.

SHNK

KERN

What is it saying? I can't...I can't hear...my ears...

Safe?

Climb inside. Quickly.

RATATATATA

EEEEEEE

Ty che blyad?

ZZZZZZZZZ

BOOM

[Wilhelm! ARE you hurt?]
[No, mama.]
[But papa!]
[Aggh... God...]
eeeee

This is Herman Greenbaum. He's hurt!

You know what to do, old buddy. The last mission of the Black Hammer Squadron. This is it.

You take care of our friends here.

I'll take care of our enemies.

BLACK HAMMER '45™

YOU GOT MY BACK, BROTHER?

Austria, April 10, 1945.

The war in Europe was nearly over. In less than **three weeks**, Hitler would be **dead**. In less than a month, the German forces would surrender to the Allies.

The Americans and Soviet brass were already carving up what was left.

Both armies were marching towards Berlin. Towards **glory**.

But the **last** battle of some of the greatest warriors of the age played out in a little **unnamed camp** near Vienna. A place that never made it into the history books.

A place that **nobody** remembers.

Nobody but a handful of survivors...

...some of whom would go on to change the **world**...

...and some of whom were--

--well, some of whom were only trying to do what they needed to do.

Come what may.

GIVE 'EM HELL, BLACK HAMMER!

The camp was **burning**. With every impact, every explosion, the trees would shake and leaves afire would float free from the branches.

Herman Greenbaum was trying to speak, but all he could do was whisper. He was trying to **pray**.

He was going into **shock**.

The Black Hammer Squadron were tasked with retrieving him **and** his wife. They were rocket scientists with precious knowledge.

And their son was the leverage the Nazis used to keep them working.

A little **boy**.

They'd been through **Hell**.

And **all** I had to do was drive them out of there.

That's all I had to do.

But **He** was in the sky above, where he most loved to be.

Flying like a God.

He was **the Ghost Hunter**, the White Death. He was the man who brought whole cities to their **knees**, who killed **soldiers** and **superheroes** and **civilians** alike.

BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA

He didn't care about the **medals** he won. He didn't want **glory**. He was the purest warrior I'd ever seen.

He wanted only to destroy.

And **Aleksandra Nazarova** with her Mechanized Soviet unit--the "Red Tide." There were only two machines left under her command--her own, and her lieutenant's.

They needed the Greenbaums, too. But the Ghost Hunter and his wing were taking them to **pieces**.

She was running out of **surprises**. Running out of **options**.

Low on ammunition. Facing an opponent in the **sky**.

No air support.

But she had been in worse situations before. She had lost everything in the war. Her family, her home, her child.

In **Smolensk**. And then **Stalingrad**. After those, she had cut a bloody path all the way to Vienna.

She never stopped fighting. **Never**.

[My husband needs a doctor! He's injured, he--]*

Listen to me. Listen carefully.

She is hurt! She cannot hear you!

Her ears!

Tell her. Tell her that I will not let your father die.

But if we try to drive clear of this forest right now, we will be exposed to the enemy. We will be an easy target.

Tell her my Captain is out there. He will make sure we are safe.

It's what he **does**.

He will save us **all**.

*Translated from German.

KBLAM KBLAM EEEEEEEEEEE

BUDDABUDDABUDDA

KCHAK

BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA

BOOOOOM

BUDDA BUDDA

[Bomb has missed the target...]

[...coming around for another pass.]

[Yes. Focus fire on the Soviets. Blast Nazarova to ash.]

[Damn this smoke. I can't see a thing down there.]

We have to stop the bleeding.

Help me.

Shouldn't we take it out?

No. Press here. Press hard.

Talk to him. Don't let him fall asleep.

[Papa! Papa, you were telling me a story!]

[Last night! The place behind the stars!]

Wil...helm...

All Right. All Right, you Kraut son of a bitch.

I've come a long way for this chance.

Let's go.

Let's GO!

BOOM!

THUNK

[--fucking joking me?]

BOOM

<Comrade Nazarova, I've failed you, I...>*

*Translated from Russian.

[Shit, I'm coming in too fast, too--]

EEEEEE

OOOOOOF

<All alone, then. **Fine.**>

<Closing heat sinks. Igniting engine overload sequence.>

<Switching to **VULKAN** configuration.>

<If I **die**...>

<...**Everything** dies.>

RATATATAT

You tricky bastard--

You can really fly! You're not the only one--

RATATATAT

THUK

THUK

THUK

No!

NO!

BRATTATTATTATTATTA

[Now I have you--]

BRRP BRAP BRRP

[NO!]

I told you I'd come back, Hammer.

Captain, can you hear me? Please respond.

KSSSSH SSHHHSHSH SSH

FUCK.

HAMMER!

BOOM

No. No, he isn't dead, he can't be.

He'll never die.

[Where are you going?]

I...I just...

Stay here. I'll come back.

Agh...

Black Hammer.

TIK TIK TIK

0:59

<Of course it's you. It would have to be you.>

<And if you're here, your friends must be nearby...>

1:57

Q.01

CHK

Captain! Let's go!

Come on!

JP. You have a job to do.

Nazarova is still out there. Go. Protect the Greenbaums. I'll be right behind you. I'll rendezvous with you after I--

BLAM

Hammer.

Hawthorne.

Nazarova.

No.

THUNK

BLAM!

You killed my brothers! Both of them! Charles and Frederick Hawthorne! Did you do it face-to-face, you fucking monster? Did you know their names?

Now you die--

No!
Stop!

BLAM

CHK

Don't
you...

Don't
you turn away
from me...

We're

Not

DONE!

SPIRAL CITY MEMORIAL CEMETARY

Nazarova. Put your gun down. Help us. We'll help you too.

We're not enemies.

Coward. You know that's not true.

This war will go on when the Germans are gone. For people like us, the war will never end--

BLAM!

BLAM!

John Paul.

Will you say a few words?

I...

In all my years, I have never known another man like Hammer Hawthorne. Mon Capitaine.

Another man as willful, or as courageous, or as true to himself... another man who... Who...

I cannot form the words that remain.

But gathered here are the people who fought alongside the Black Hammer Squadron, and their children and grandchildren, and more--

The ones who survived **because** of us. He disappeared in that blast. There was nothing left of him to bury. But what he left behind...

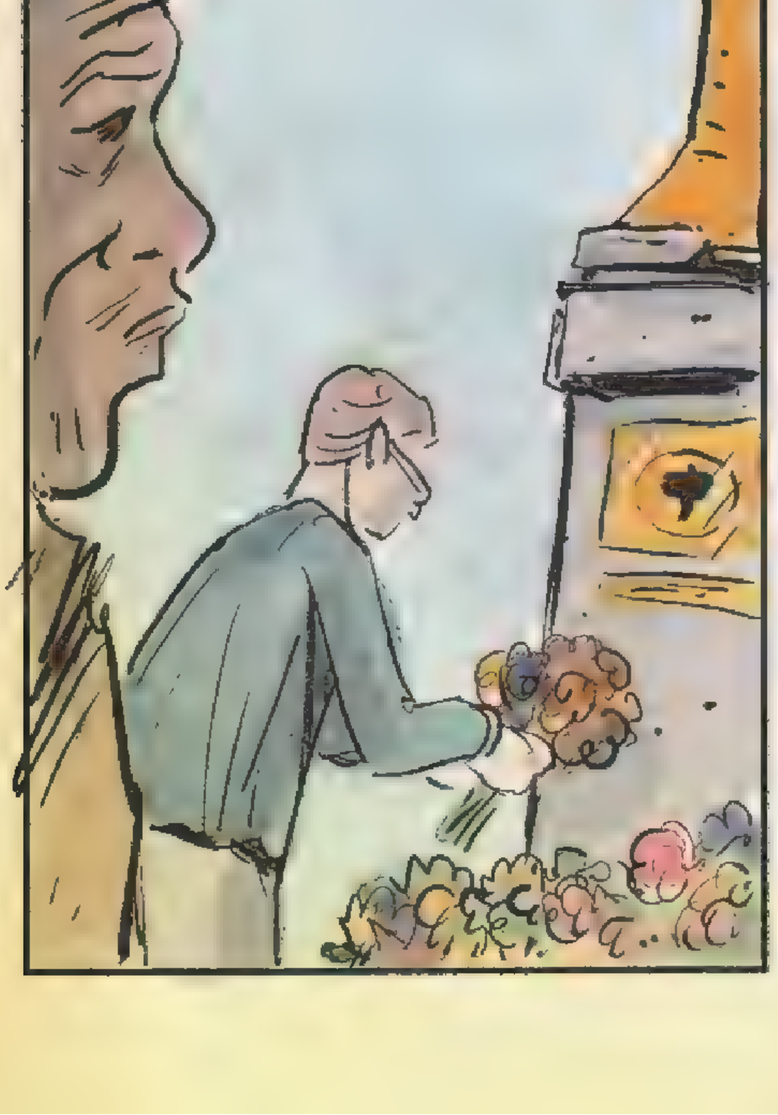
The **Greenbaum** family, who founded **Project W.E.I.R.D.**

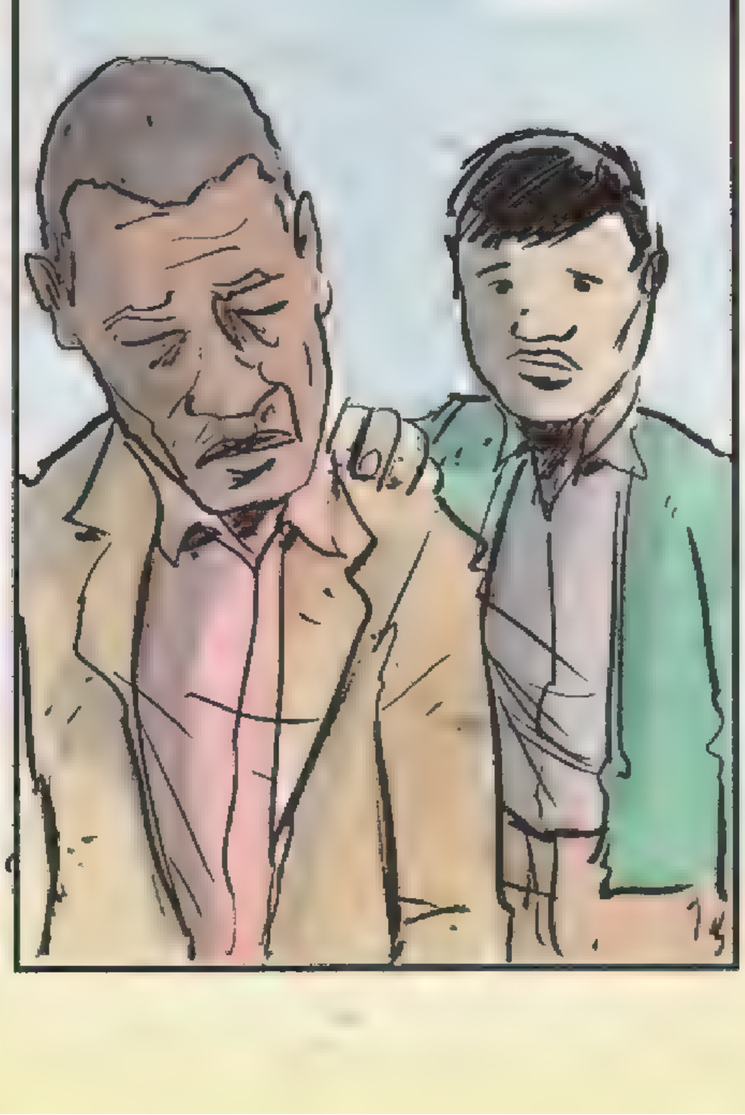
The lives he saved all through the war, people who would be doctors and scientists, artists and teachers...

...we were only fighting men, doing our **duty**. We had a job to do.

Wherever he is, Hammer would be **proud**.

I...I will never forget him or the battle that claimed him.





THE QUANTUM AGE™

SPIRAL CITY. THE 31ST CENTURY.

PRIVATE RECORDS OF ARCHIVE V, CHARTER MEMBER OF THE QUANTUM LEAGUE, AUGUST 27, 3016...

AFTER HELPING LASER LAD AND STORM GIRL WRAP UP THE JELLY FLOOD CLEAN-UP ON THE MOON COLONY OF BALKON, I AM HEADED BACK TO *QUANTUM HQ* FOR SOME MUCH NEEDED PERSONAL TIME.

HEY, ARCHIVE V! HOW DID THE CLEAN-UP MISSION GO?

GREETINGS, TECHNO BOY. THE SITUATION ON BALKON IS SATISFACTORY. LASER LAD STAYED BEHIND TO FINALIZE THINGS. BUT THE BALKONIANS ARE NO LONGER IN DANGER.

AWESOME!

AH! NO FAIR, YOU'RE CHEATING, GLUE GIRL!

AM NOT! YOU JUST *STINK* AT HOLO-BALL, FURNACE BOY!

HEY, ARCHIVE V, WHAT'S UP, MAN?

NOTHING IS UP, GRAVITY LAD. I AM SIMPLY HEADED TO MY LABORATORY FOR SOME PERSONAL TIME.

WELL, DON'T FORGET WE HAVE THE *NEW MEMBER* INITIATION TRIALS IN ABOUT AN HOUR!

YES, JUDO GIRL, I AM FULLY AWARE. AS YOU WELL KNOW, I DO NOT FORGET THINGS.

RIGHT ON. LATER, ARCHIVE V!

I SOMETIMES WORRY THAT THE OTHER LEAGUERS DO NOT TAKE THINGS SERIOUSLY ENOUGH.

OR PERHAPS I AM JUST JEALOUS THAT THEY CAN ALL RELAX AND INTERACT WITH ONE ANOTHER SO EFFORTLESSLY WHILE I CAN'T SEEM TO EVER STOP WORKING.

BUT I WOULD HAVE IT NO OTHER WAY. THERE IS MUCH TO DO. AND EVEN WHEN MY WORK WITH THE QUANTUM LEAGUE IS COMPLETE, I HAVE MY OWN *PERSONAL PROJECTS* TO ATTEND TO. AND NO PROJECT HAS *BEGUILED* ME AS MUCH AS *THIS ONE...*

...WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE HEROES OF THE 20TH CENTURY?

IT IS A *MYSTERY* THAT HAS PUZZLED EVEN MY COMPUTER BRAIN. ONE THAT I FEAR THERE MAY BE NO ANSWER TO.

COMPUTA, OPEN SUB-FILE DESIGNATE: *THE FIRST CATACLYSM.*

AFFIRMATIVE. OPENING

THEY WERE THE GREATEST HEROES OF A TIME LONG *LONG* AGO...

...LED BY *ABRAHAM SLAM,* GOLDEN AGE MASKED CRIME BUSTER.

GOLDEN GAIL, AMERICA'S SUPER-POWERED SWEET-HEART.

BARBALIEN, THE WARLORD FROM MARS.

COLONEL WEIRD, INTERSTELLAR ADVENTURER.

MADAME DRAGONFLY, MISTRESS OF THE MACABRE.

AND OF COURSE, THIS ERA'S GREATEST HERO OF ALL... *BLACK HAMMER!*

THESE INCREDIBLE HEROES SERVED AS AN INSPIRATION FOR US HERE IN THE *31ST CENTURY.* IT WAS BECAUSE OF THEIR EXAMPLE THAT WE FORMED *THE QUANTUM LEAGUE,* A COLLECTION OF SUPER POWERED TEENAGERS FROM DIFFERENT PLANETS ACROSS THE UNIVERSE.

ONE OF THE REASONS THESE HEROES STILL CAPTURE OUR ATTENTION IS THAT NO ONE KNOWS WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO THEM.

IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE, CIRCA 1986 A.D., A COSMIC DESPOT KNOWN AS *ANTI-GOD* ATTACKED SPIRAL CITY. THESE HEROES GATHERED AND FOUGHT BACK.

BLACK HAMMER WAS THE ONE WHO STRUCK THE KILLING BLOW.

BUT UPON DESTROYING ANTI-GOD, THERE WAS A FLASH OF ENERGY AND ALL THE HEROES *DISAPPEARED.*

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM. ACCORDING TO ALL MY RECORDS, THEY WERE *NEVER SEEN AGAIN.*

YET RUMORS PERSISTED OVER THE DECADES THAT THESE HEROES OF YESTERDAY *WERE NOT DEAD*...THAT THEY WERE STILL OUT THERE *SOMEWHERE.*

IF THEY *DID* LIVE ON, THESE PROUD AND NOBLE HEROES SURELY EMBARKED ON SOME GREAT NEW ADVENTURE...

HAS ANYONE SEEN MY GODDAMN SUNGLASSES ANYWHERE?!

I HAVEN'T SEEN THEM, GAIL.

WELL, ***SOMEONE*** TOOK THEM! I LEFT THEM RIGHT THERE ON THE TABLE LAST NIGHT!

HMM...YES, RIGHT NEXT TO THE ***EMPTY*** BOTTLE OF BOURBON AND THE ***THREE*** OVERSTUFFED ASHTRAYS I CLEANED UP THIS MORNING.

A LITTLE HUNG OVER, ARE WE, GAIL? THE MORNING SUN A ***BIT BRIGHT?***

MIND YOUR BUSINESS, BARBIE. WHERE DID YOU ***PUT*** THEM?!

I DIDN'T SEE YOUR SUN-GLASSES.

PFFT! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE ON MY GODDAMN ***SIDE*** HERE, BARBIE!

LANGUAGE, GAIL.

SCREW YOU TO TUESDAY, OLD MAN.

GRUMBLY-GRUMBLE-CRAP!

SHRACK!

You are looking for something?

CHRIST!! HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO *TELL* YOU?! DON'T *DO* THAT, COLONEL!

Why is everything upside-down today?

IT'S NOT. *YOU* ARE, MORON.

Ah, yes. That makes much more sense.

SHRACK!

Ah. Yes, better.

WHAT DO YOU *WANT*, WEIRDO?

You misplaced something. I have seen this object you seek...

LEMME GUESS, YOU "HAVE SEEN THE HIDDEN SHAPE OF THINGS... THAT PATTERN WHICH LIES BENEATH ALL REALITY" BLAH BLAH BLAH.

...

Um...no. I saw your sunglasses over there.

WHAT?! AT DRAGONFLY'S CABIN?

Yes.

...OH GREAT.

KNOCK KNOCK

OPEN UP, WITCH.

OH, GAIL. IT'S YOU.

CAN I HELP YOU?

THOSE ARE *MY* SUN-GLASSES!

WHAT? *THESE* OLD THINGS? I FOUND THEM LYING AROUND THIS MORNING.

WHAT IS IT THEY SAY? FINDERS KEEPERS?

YOU NEED TO LEARN TO KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THINGS THAT *DON'T BELONG TO YOU*, DRAGONFLY!

OH, GAIL. IT'S ALWAYS SUCH A PLEASURE WHEN YOU COME AND VISIT.

HEY LOOK, HERE'S A *MAGIC WAND* FOR YOU, CREEP FACE.

YES, I AM SURE THAT *WHEREVER* THE HEROES WENT, AND *WHATEVER* CHALLENGES THEY ENCOUNTERED, THEY FACED IT WITH GRACE AND COURAGE, JUST AS *THE QUANTUM LEAGUE* WOULD.

SORRY TO INTERRUPT, ARCHIVE V, BUT THE NEW RECRUITS ARE WAITING IN THE ASSEMBLY ROOM.

NO PROBLEM, BINARY LAD. I'M ON MY WAY.

ACTUALLY, IT'S BINARY *LASS* THIS WEEK.

AH, YES. I SEE. SO THEN, ARE ANY OF THE NEW RECRUITS LOOKING PROMISING?

IT'S HARD TO SAY...ONE DID CATCH MY EYE, THOUGH.

AH, YOU'RE FINALLY HERE, ARCHIVE V. WE CAN BEGIN.

I APOLOGIZE FOR BEING LATE, SAND BOY. SOMETHING CAUGHT MY ATTENTION.

NOW THEN, AS THIS MONTH'S ACTING LEADER OF THE QUANTUM LEAGUE, I HEREBY CALL THIS NEW MEMBER MEETING TO OFFICIAL ORDER.

SO, WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, WOULD OUR NEW PLEDGES PLEASE STEP FORWARD?

PLEASE STATE YOUR NAME, YOUR HOME PLANET, AND YOUR SUPER POWER.

I AM FELINDA TRAK FROM VWENTILLA. MY CODENAME IS ***COSMO GIRL.*** I CAN CREATE PORTALS AND TRANSPORT PEOPLE AND THINGS ACROSS SPACE AND TIME.

My name is Erb. My codename is Erb. I am from Phages. I am a telepath.

WAIT! I WANT TO JOIN TOO!

WHAT?! THIS IS A CLOSED MEETING! INVITATION ONLY!

MY NAME IS ***HAMMER LASS.*** I WAS FROM EARTH AND I WANT TO JOIN THE QUANTUM LEAGUE!

THAT--THAT ***HAMMER!*** WHERE DID YOU GET THAT?!

THIS OLD THING? IT'S A FAMILY HEIRLOOM.

BUT THAT-- THAT WAS ***BLACK HAMMER'S!*** IT WAS LOST WHEN THE HEROES DISAPPEARED!

DISAPPEARED?

ARCHIVE V, THEIR DISAPPEARANCE WAS ***ONLY THE BE-GINNING*** OF THEIR STORY.

THE STORY CONTINUES IN THE QUANTUM LEAGUE #1 ON SALE JULY 4TH!

5 10 JAN 20 25
5 10 FE
20
10 MAR
20
ERIDANUS
TAURUS
Hyade
10 MAY
25
30
5 JUN
Nath
TRIANGULUM
ARIE
PERSEUS
GEMIN
ANDROMED
10 MAY 20
25
Psc
25
CJW

SPIRAL CITY. ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIVE YEARS FROM NOW.

CURFEW NOW IN EFFECT! CURFEW NOW IN EFFECT!

ANYONE VIOLATING CURFEW WITHOUT PROPER CLEARANCE WILL BE PROSECUTED TO THE FULLEST EXTENT OF EARTH CITADEL LAW.

HELLO?

QUIET! THEY'RE EVERY-WHERE.

HEY, YOU'RE *JUST A KID!*

MY CREDS ARE AS GOOD AS ANYONE'S. DO YOU HAVE IT OR NOT? DID YOU *FIND IT?*

THE CITADEL WILL BE ALL OVER YOU IF THEY CATCH YOU. YOU KNOW THAT, RIGHT?

I'M USED TO AVOIDING THE CITADEL. JUST GIVE IT TO ME.

MEMORIZE THAT, KID, AND THEN *DESTROY* IT. TRUST ME, YOU DON'T WANT TO GET CAUGHT WITH THAT.

AND-- YOU'RE SURE THIS IS REALLY *THE PLACE?*

I'M SURE. YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS?

I DON'T HAVE A CHOICE.

ALERT! CURFEW NOW IN EFFECT! CURFEW NOW IN EFFECT!

STOP FOR SCANNING. ARE YOUR AUTHORIZATIONS UP TO DATE?

YES, OFFICER.

HOMEWORLD?

EARTH.

bleep

REASON FOR BEING OUT?

JUST COMING BACK FROM WORK. SANITATION LEVELS.

LEGAL NAME:
Trev Trevz
HEIGHT: 5' 10"
EYES: Brown
HAIR: None
PLACE OF BIRTH:
Spiral City, Earth

OKAY, SON. EVERYTHING LOOKS GOOD. MAKE YOUR WAY HOME IMMEDIATELY PLEASE.

YES, OFFICER. OF COURSE.

ALERT! YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED FOR SECONDARY SCANNING. PLEASE DO NOT MOVE.

ALERT!
ALERT!

ALERT! ALERT! ALIEN DNA DETECTED! CURFEW BREACHED! APPREHEND IMMEDIATELY!

WHOA! HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!

FREEZE! DO NOT MOVE!

--UNGH!

NO!

CHOOM CHOOM

STOP! I DON'T WANT TO HURT ANYONE!

ALERT! ALL UNITS! CODE 1! ALL UNITS CODE 1!

CHOOM CHOOM

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS EARLIER.

THIS IS QUANTUM LEAGUE AWAY TEAM THREE REPORTING IN. WE'VE MANAGED TO FIND THE ROYAL SUBMERSIBLE ON GLATTAS-6 AND WILL BE ABLE TO ESCORT THEM SAFELY TO THE SUMMIT ON SCIENCE SATELLITE SIX.

EXCELLENT. THANK YOU, STORMA. LET ME KNOW WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED THERE. WE MAY NEED SOME HELP HERE ON EARTH SOON.

THIS IS HAMMER LASS AND AWAY TEAM TWO REPORTING IN. WE ENCOUNTERED NO PROBLEMS DEALING WITH THE RAVALLARIAN MOON EATER. WE ARE JUST ARRIVING BACK AT QUANTUM HQ NOW.

THANK YOU, HAMMER LASS. PLEASE PROCEED IMMEDIATELY TO THE MONITOR ROOM. I MUST SPEAK WITH YOU ABOUT URGENT LEAGUE BUSINESS.

YOU GOT IT. SEE YOU IN A FEW.

ARCHIVE, THIS IS AWAY TEAM ONE.

WE ARE IN EARTH ORBIT RESPONDING TO THE STRANGE SIGNAL YOU WERE PICKING UP, BUT THERE IS NOTHING HERE.

THE SIGNAL IS MULTIPLYING AND GETTING STRONGER, GRAVITUS. I NEED YOU TO KEEP LOOKING. THERE MUST BE SOMETHING GOING ON OUT THERE.

I DON'T KNOW, ARCHIVE. I THINK YOU'RE JUST PICKING UP WHITE NOISE DOWN THERE...

I AM NOT INTERESTED IN ***YOUR OPINIONS,*** MODULA. I AM SIMPLY INTERESTED IN YOU THREE GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF WHATEVER IS OUT THERE IN EARTH'S ORBIT. SO PLEASE KEEP LOOKING.

:SIGH: FINE. WHATEVER, EGGHEAD.

I HEARD THAT.

I KNOW. YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO.

ARCHIVE. YOU WANTED TO SEE ME?

AH, YES, HAMMER LASS. THANK YOU FOR COMING.

SO? WHAT CAN I HELP YOU WITH?

WELL, IT'S A RATHER DELICATE MATTER, ACTUALLY...

PLEASE MUTE ALL COMMS AND CHANGE ALL VID-LINKS TO ONE WAY ONLY.

AFFIRMATIVE.

IT MUST BE IMPORTANT IF YOU WANT PRIVACY.

OH, IT IS OF THE ***UTMOST*** IMPORTANCE. ***VITAL*** QUANTUM LEAGUE BUSINESS...

I'M NOT SURE I GOT THAT. WE MIGHT NEED TO TRY AGAIN.

I WOULD BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO--

QUANTUM CODE RED! QUANTUM CODE RED!

WHAT'S GOING ON?

I DON'T KNOW.

OPEN COMMS! ALL TEAMS REPORT IN!

ARCHIVE-- WE FOUND THE SIGNAL--WE-- OH--!

IT'S *THE MARTIANS!* THE MARTIANS ARE COMING!

...OH GOD!

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER.

HEY, SWEETHEART, HOW'S ABOUT ANOTHER ROUND?

YEAH, YEAH. JUST HOLD ON.

YOU BEEN SAYING THAT FOR TEN MINUTES!

YEAH? AND YOU'VE BEEN A PAIN IN MY ASS FOR THE LAST THREE HOURS, SO SHUT YOUR HOLE AND GIMME A MINUTE.

CAN I HELP YOU, KID?

OH SURE! YOU SERVE *THIS KID* RIGHT AWAY AND I GOTTA SIT HERE WAITING?! I'M DRY, SISTER! *DRY!*

LISTEN, KID, THERE'S NO WAY I CAN SERVE YOU. YOU CAN'T BE MORE THAN SIXTEEN.

CAN I--CAN I TALK TO YOU *IN PRIVATE?*

UH. NO. YOU *CAN'T.*

I THINK YOU BETTER TO TAKE A HIKE.

BUT...I KNOW *WHO* YOU ARE.

DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABO--

I KNOW THAT YOU'RE *HAMMER LASS!*

...YOU BETTER FOLLOW ME.

WHAT ABOUT MY DRINK?!

POUR IT YOURSELF.

THANK YOU FOR TAKING TIME TO TALK. I KNOW THAT YOU--

WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!

I-I--

WHO SENT YOU?

PLEASE--NO ONE SENT ME. I FOUND YOU MYSELF. I USED EVERYTHING I HAD TO FIND OUT WHERE YOU WERE. I--I'M A BIG FAN.

BULL.

IT'S TRUE! YOU--YOU WERE MY FAVORITE ***QUANTUM LEAGUER.*** I HAD TO FIND YOU. I HAD TO FIND ***YOU*** MOST OF ALL.

YOU'RE LIKELY TO GET YOURSELF KILLED LOOKING FOR US. ***THE PRESIDENT*** AND HIS CITADEL POLICE WANT ME DEAD AND THEY DON'T MIND A LITTLE COLLATERAL DAMAGE, TRUST ME.

I KNOW, BUT YOU HAVE TO ***COME BACK.*** WE ***NEED YOU.***

WE?

THE MARTIANS.

...THE LAST OF THE MARTIANS *NEED YOUR HELP.*

VANT POIN ER

- B4 -

"25607"

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO.

ALL QUANTUM LEAGUERS, PULL OUT OF MANHATTAN NOW! RETREAT!

THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF MARTIANS IN THE CITY. GET OUT OF THERE! YOU CANNOT CONTAIN IT!

RETREAT!? ARE YOU INSANE, ARCHIVE?! WE CAN'T RETREAT!

THE MARTIAN ARMY HAS ALREADY DECIMATED TOKYO *AND* SHANGHAI!

THEY ARE NOT SPREADING OUT, THEY ARE MOVING FROM ONE HEAVILY POPULATED AREA TO THE NEXT LIKE A--LIKE A SWARM! BILLIONS HAVE ALREADY DIED! *IF* WE CAN'T STOP THEM IN MANHATTAN--

YOU ***CAN'T*** STOP THEM, GRAVITUS. THAT IS MY POINT. WE NEED TO-- WE NEED TO TAKE DRASTIC MEASURES HERE.

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU SUGGESTING, ARCHIVE?!

I--LYNDDA--YOU NEED TO GET OUT OF THERE.

WHAT?!

WE ARE ON A PRIVATE CHANNEL NOW, LYNDDA LISTEN TO ME--I HAVE--I HAVE RUN THE CALCULATIONS AND ALL THE SCENARIOS A DOZEN TIMES. THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO STOP THIS.

YOU HAVE TO GET AWAY FROM THERE. NOW.

NO WAY! I AM NOT LEAVING THE OTHERS BEHIND! I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE! JUST--JUST DO WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO ***STOP THEM!***

I--

VERY WELL...***ERB,*** CAN YOU HEAR ME? COME IN, ERB.

Erb is here, Archive. Erb is hearing you.

ERB, I NEED-- I NEED YOU TO USE YOUR FULL POWER. I NEED YOU TO DO IT NOW.

But Erb cannot use all Erb's power.

If Erb were to use all Erb's power it would--

I KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN, ERB! IT IS THE ONLY WAY! YOU MUST DO IT!

DO IT NOW!

Very well. Erb must follow orders...

BOOM

...GODS SAVE ME.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER.

A MARTIAN?! BUT I THOUGHT--

NOT ALL OF US. WE ARE *VERY GOOD* AT HIDING.

I AM-- I AM NOT LIKE THE ONES WHO ATTACKED EARTH, YOU MUST BELIEVE ME. MY PARENTS WERE AMONG THOSE WHO *PROTESTED* THE WAR. THE ONE'S WHO REFUSED TO FIGHT.

I MEAN--OUR ANCESTORS EVEN WORKED TOGETHER AT ONE TIME! THE GREAT BARBALIEN AND BLACK HAMMER!

THAT IS ANCIENT HISTORY, KID. JUST RELAX I'M NOT GONNA TURN YOU IN. GOT NO FIGHT LEFT IN ME.

JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT.

I WANT YOU TO COME BACK! THE UNIVERSE NEEDS YOU. *THE PRESIDENT* AND HIS CITADEL ARE WIPING OUT ALIEN SPECIES ACROSS THE GALAXY. WE NEED THE QUANTUM LEAGUE!

LOOK, I KNOW YOU WANT TO DO GOOD. BUT THERE IS NO MORE "DOING GOOD." IT'S TOO LATE TO DRESS UP IN COSTUMES AND PLAY GAMES. THE UNIVERSE IS FUCKED.

YOU SAY YOU'RE GOOD AT HIDING. WELL, THEN, *GO HIDE.* SAVE YOURSELF. THE QUANTUM LEAGUE IS *DEAD.*

I RISKED EVERYTHING TO COME TO EARTH, I SPENT EVERY CRED I HAD TO FIND OUT WHERE *YOU* WERE HIDING...

...AND NOW THE *CITADEL* IS AFTER ME! I HAVE *NO-WHERE* ELSE TO GO! YOU *HAVE* TO HELP ME!

WHAT DID YOU SAY?!

I--I SAID YOU HAVE TO HELP ME.

NO, YOU SAID THE *CITADEL* WAS *AFTER YOU!* ARE YOU TELLING ME THEY ARE AFTER YOU *RIGHT NOW*...AS IN, THEY COULD HAVE *FOLLOWED YOU* HERE? *TO ME?!*

WELL, YEAH, BUT I THOUGHT YOU WOULD HELP ME SO--

--AND STAY AWAY FROM ME!

THWUD

MARTIAN!

NO! PLEASE! BE QUIET! DON'T!

MARTIAN! KID IS A MARTIAN! I SAW HIM!

YOU ARE VIOLATING ALIEN CURFEW AND ARE UNDER ARREST BY ORDER OF THE PRESIDENT OF EARTH!

NO NO NO NO!

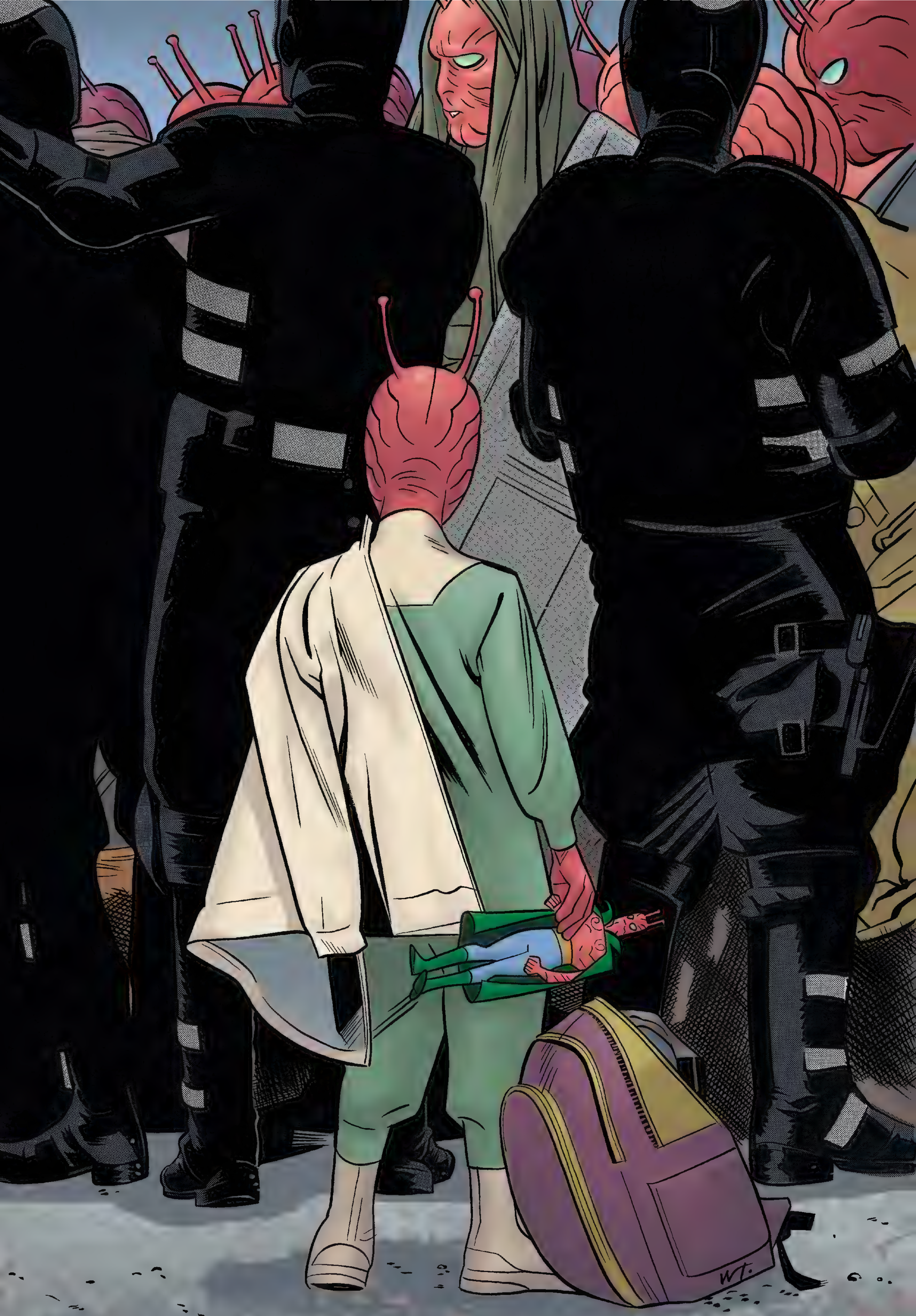
FWASH

I--WHO ARE YOU?! WHERE AM I?!

FWASH

THEY USED TO CALL ME *MODULA.* WE'RE *WHAT'S LEFT* OF THE QUANTUM LEAGUE...

...AND WE HAPPEN TO BE LOOKING FOR *NEW RECRUITS.*



MACLEAN

IT IS HARD TO REMEMBER THE EARLY DAYS. ACTUALLY, I DON'T REMEMBER THE MARTIAN INVASION AT ALL. I WAS TOO YOUNG.

BUT I DO REMEMBER THE FIRST FEW YEARS AFTER IT--WHEN EVERYTHING STARTED TO CHANGE.

HOW COULD I FORGET?

DO NOT LOOK!

I SAW THINGS NO CHILD SHOULD EVER HAVE TO SEE.

I SAID DO NOT LOOK. JUST KEEP WALKING!

Y-YES, PAPA.

WHAT IS YOUR REASON FOR TRAVEL?

WE ARE VISITING FAMILY ON HEPTON 4.

YOU HAVE FAMILY *ALL THE WAY* OUT THERE?

YES, SIR.

WHAT ABOUT YOU, BOY? HAVE YOU EVER TRAVELLED TO THE OUTER RIM?

NO, SIR. THIS IS MY FIRST TIME.

HAVE YOU SEEN OR BEEN IN CONTACT WITH ANY *NON-HUMAN* LIFE FORMS IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS?

NO, OFFICER.

WE WERE TALKING TO *THE BOY.*

WELL, BOY? HAVE YOU *OR* YOUR PARENTS BEEN IN CONTACT WITH *ANY* ALIENS?

N-NO, SIR. WE HATE THEM. WE W-WANT THEM ALL DEAD. IT'S THE ONLY WAY WE CAN ALL BE SAFE AGAIN.

GOOD BOY. YOU MAKE SURE YOU REPORT *ANY* SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY.

YES, SIR. OF COURSE, SIR.

TRAVEL SAFE NOW. AND DON'T WORRY. ***THE PRESIDENT*** IS WATCHING OVER YOU. WE ARE ALL UNDER HIS PROTECTION NOW.

PRAISE THE PRESIDENT. PRAISE EARTHGOV.

YOU DID WELL, SON. JUST AS WE PRACTICED.

QUIET! THEY ARE ***LISTENING!*** ***THE PRESIDENT*** HAS EARS EVERYWHERE!

IT IS ALL RIGHT. WE ARE TAKING OFF. WE ARE SAFE NOW.

*MY FATHER SPOKE THE WORDS. HE MEANT TO MAKE ME FEEL BETTER, BUT I KNEW THAT HE WAS **SCARED TOO.***

IT DIDN'T MATTER **HOW FAR** WE RAN. FEAR WAS **ALWAYS WITH US.**

I-I DO NOT THINK THIS IS THE RIGHT PLACE.

THIS IS IT. I AM CERTAIN. JUST A LITTLE FURTHER UP AHEAD.

eeep

HERE-- SEE?!

PRAISE MARS! WE HAVE MADE IT! WE ARE TRULY **SAFE!**

<WHO ARE YOU?! HOW DID YOU FIND US?!>

<KILL THEM! WE CANNOT RISK IT! THE PRESIDENT'S POLICE ARE EVERYWHERE!>

<NO! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, HANZ HANS!>

<HOW DO YOU KNOW ***MY NAME***, HUMAN?!>

BECAUSE, HANZ HANS OF MARS...

...I AM YOUR COUSIN!

EVEN THEN, EVEN AS A CHILD I KNEW...

...WE MAY HAVE STOPPED RUNNING, BUT WE WOULD ***NEVER BE SAFE AGAIN...***

EVEN NOW... A DECADE LATER, I AM NOT SAFE. NO ONE IS.

I--WHO ARE YOU?! WHERE AM I?!

THEY USED TO CALL ME MODULA. WE'RE WHAT'S LEFT OF THE QUANTUM LEAGUE. AND WE HAPPEN TO BE LOOKING FOR NEW RECRUITS.

Erb thinking not a good idea tell him everything, Ginna.

HE CAN HEAR EVERYTHING YOU'RE THINKING, ERB. BESIDES, IF WE CAN'T TRUST ONE OF HIS KIND, WHO THE HELL CAN WE TRUST?

Erb thinking we trust no one.

H-HOW DID YOU FIND ME?

ERB AND I MAKE IT OUR BUSINESS TO KEEP AN EYE ON *ALL* THE OLD QUANTUM LEAGUERS. CAN'T BE TOO SAFE THESE DAYS.

WE SAW YOU APPROACH HAMMER LASS. GOT TO SAY, KID. THAT WAS PRETTY DUMB. EARTH IS THE *LAST PLACE* YOU WANNA BE. WHY'D YOU GO TO HER FIRST?

I-I'M *BARBALI-TEEN.* AND SHE IS THE ANCESTOR OF BLACK HAMMER.

WE'RE BOTH INSPIRED BY SPIRAL CITY'S LEGENDARY HEROES. IT'S OUR LEGACY TO WORK TOGETHER.

UH HUH. YOU REALLY WANNA BE A HERO, YOU GOTTA BE SMARTER THAN THAT.

Erb not liking your filthy smoking. Erb telling you again and again to quit!

ERB IS DRIVING ME BAT-SHIT CRAZY IS WHAT ERB IS DOING. NOW SHUT YOUR HOLE, WEIRD BALL, I'M TALKING HERE.

WHAT--WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU? I DIDN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE YOU.

WHAT DO YOU *THINK* HAPPENED? *YOUR PEOPLE* HAPPENED. LOST MY LEGS IN THE BATTLE OF MANHATTAN.

YOU SAID YOU'RE RECRUITING. ARE YOU ***REALLY*** REFORMING THE QUANTUM LEAGUE?

WHO SAID THAT?!

YOU DID.

NO. I SAID I WAS ***RECRUITING.*** THE QUANTUM LEAGUE ***IS DEAD,*** KID. WHAT ERB AND I GOT PLANNED IS A LITTLE MORE... ***DISCREET.***

AND YOU NEED ***ME?***

Erb and Modula be thinking you are Martian. Be thinking you can change your shape. Be thinking are perfect for our mission.

AND WHAT IS THIS MISSION?

WE'RE GONNA ***ASSASSINATE*** THE PRESIDENT OF EARTH.

WHAT?!

YOU HEARD ME. WE'RE GOING AFTER THE ROTTEN HEAD OF THIS ROTTEN UNIVERSE.

WAY I SEE IT, KID, WE GOT NOTHING TO LOSE. THE UNIVERSE HATES THE QUANTUM LEAGUE AS MUCH AS THEY HATE YOU AND ALL THE OTHER ALIENS.

HELL, IT WAS US WHO TRIED TO CREATE HARMONY AMONG ALL THE WORLDS. THEY BLAME US FOR LETTING THE MARTIANS DO WHAT THEY DID.

BUT EVEN IF I CAN DISGUISE MYSELF, HOW THE HELL CAN I EVER GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE PRESIDENT. HE IS IN THE CITADEL. HE HAS THE WHOLE CITADEL POLICE ON HIS SIDE.

I ADMIT THERE ARE A ***FEW PROBLEMS*** LEFT TO SOLVE. AND WHEN YOU GOT TO SOLVE PROBLEMS, THERE IS ONLY ONE MAN FOR THE JOB...

THAT'S WHY WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO GET THE ***SMARTEST MAN*** IN THE UNIVERSE. WE'RE GONNA GO GET ***ARCHIVE!***

THE MOON

WHAT WAS THAT?!

Erb is thinking our ship is ***under attack...***

"The Citadel Police has found us!"

THE POLICE?! WE'LL NEVER OUTRUN THEM! WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO?!

OH NO! WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?! OH DEAR! *IF ONLY* WE HAD THREE BADASS, SUPER POWERED BEINGS HERE TO PROTECT US.

TIME TO MAN-UP, BARBALI-TEEN! HERE COMES YOUR FIRST *SUPERHERO FIGHT!*

MODULA!

NO WAY! WARILLA!

WARILLA?! THERE IS NO WAY WARILLA WAS THE BEST QUANTUM LEAGUER, GUS GUSZ!

IS TOO!

YOU GUYS ARE BOTH CRAZY! DOPPLER DIVA WAS THE TOPS!

AND WHAT ARE YOU YOUNGLINGS UP TO?

N-NOTHING, ELDER.

AH, YOU CAN'T FOOL ME, TREV TREVZ! I ***KNOW*** YOU KIDS WERE LOOKING AT THOSE OLD QUANTUM LEAGUE HOLOS AGAIN!

DON'T WORRY, I AM NOT ANGRY.

I KNOW MANY OF THE OTHERS DO NOT LIKE YOU ALL TALKING ABOUT THE HEROES, BUT I DON'T MIND. I USED TO LOVE SUPERHEROES TOO WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE.

YOU DID?! BUT THE QUANTUM LEAGUE WASN'T AROUND BACK THEN, WERE THEY?

OH NO. THIS WAS LONG BEFORE THE QUANTUM LEAGUE. BUT EVEN BACK ON MARS WE HAD A GREAT ***LEGACY*** OF HEROES. NONE GREATER THAN ***BARBALIEN.***

YOU ***HAVE*** HEARD OF BARBALIEN, ***HAVEN'T YOU?***

WAIT, ELDER, YOU MEAN MARS HAD *ITS OWN* SUPERHERO?!

WELL, SORT OF...

YOU SEE, BARBALIEN WAS A HERO *ON EARTH.* THIS WAS LONG, LONG AGO. AND UNFORTUNATELY THAT WAS A TIME WHEN MARS WAS NOT AS *OPEN MINDED* AS WAS IN OUR ERA.

"HE WAS FORCED TO LEAVE MARS, AN OUTCAST.

"BUT THERE HE FOUND A HOME AND BECAME A *GREAT HERO.*"

LET ME SEE HERE. I USED TO HAVE SOME OF MY CHILDHOOD THINGS. I WONDER...

HA! HERE HE IS! BARBALIEN!

WOW! I CAN'T BELIEVE WE NEVER LEARNED ABOUT HIM IN SCHOOL.

WELL, TREV TREVZ, AFTER THE MARTIAN FANATICS ATTACKED EARTH, OUR PEOPLE'S VIEW OF HEROES CHANGED DRAMATICALLY.

THESE DAYS...WELL HEROES LIKE HIM DON'T REALLY EXIST ANY MORE AT ALL, DO THEY?

SHHOOK

UNGH!

ELDER!

SHRAK SHRAK

RUN!

MOMMAƵ! POPPAƵ!

MOMMAƵ!

THEY HAVE FOUND US! THE CITADEL POLICE HAS FOUND US!

"THEY FOUND US! THE BASTARDS FOUND US, ERB!"

Erb is thinking we are in ***large trouble,*** Ginna. Erb is thinking going after Martian boy was a ***large mistake.***

Erb shall activate the ship's weapons systems.

NO... I GOT THIS.

Erb is thinking you are thinking of using your powers. And Erb knows what happened last time that happened.

JUST OPEN THE AIRLOCK, ERB!

STAY BACK, KID. IF THIS GOES BADLY, WELL...IN THAT CASE WE'RE ALL FUCKED. SO IT WAS NICE MEETING YOU.

CAN YOU HEAR ME, ERB?

Erb is hearing you loud and clear, Modula.

GOOD. THIS IS PROBABLY GOING TO KILL ME. BUT IF IT DOESN'T GET READY TO REMOTE PILOT MY CHAIR BACK INSIDE. GOT IT?

Erb has got it.

CAN SHE--CAN SHE STILL DO IT?

Erb does not know. It has been a long time since either of us has faced battle.

But Erb seriously doubts it.

THE COMMUNICATOR IS STILL ON, IDIOTS. I CAN HEAR YOU.

Ah. Erb is embarrassed.

ERB IS GOING TO **EAT HIS WORDS,** IS WHAT ERB IS GOING TO DO.

UNGH--! COME TO MOMMA, YOU **SLIMY FUCKS!**

ARRRGGH!

KZZAARK

SHE DID IT!

GET HER, ERB! GET HER!

Erb is getting!

Erb knew she should not have used her powers. Erb knew she was too weak!

IS SHE--

She is fine. She must rest. We are safe for now.

SAFE **FOR NOW.** IT IS ALWAYS JUST "FOR NOW." MOMENTS OF CALM BEFORE THE NEXT **REALLY BAD THING** HAPPENS.

POPPA!

NO! LEAVE HIM!

BUT THE CALM ALWAYS BREAKS. AND DEATH AND CHAOS ALWAYS FIND YOU. THAT IS JUST THE WAY THE UNIVERSE IS NOW. THAT IS ALL I HAVE EVER KNOWN.

MAYBE I WAS FOOLISH TO THINK I COULD CHANGE THINGS. MAYBE I WAS AN IDIOT TO EVEN TRY.

MAYBE ALL THE REAL HEROES REALLY ARE GONE.

ERB...WHY DOES MODULA HAVE AN IMAGE OF THE PRESIDENT OF EARTH?

OR MAYBE THE PEOPLE WE THOUGHT WERE HEROES ARE JUST REAL PEOPLE AFTER ALL.

That is simple... Modula has an image of The President because they used to be **lovers.**

MISTER PRESIDENT! ALL OF THE MARTIANS ARE DEAD SAVE FOR A FEW WHO ESCAPED INTO THE HILLS. BUT WE'LL FIND THEM.

EXCELLENT WORK, MEN.

MAYBE THE HEROES ARE AS **LOST** AS THE REST OF US NOW.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE US TO DO NOW, MISTER PRESIDENT?

MISTER PRESIDENT?

SIR?

BURN IT.

BURN IT ALL. THEN SEARCH THESE HILLS AND KILL EVERY LAST ALIEN YOU FIND.

QUANTIS

GRAVITUS

I-I'LL DO IT. I'LL HELP YOU **KILL THE PRESIDENT.**

NO MATTER WHAT, **GRAVITUS HAS TO DIE.**

WHAT IS IT THAT YOU WANT?

I WISH TO STAND BEFORE YOU AS AN *INDIVIDUAL.*

YOU UNDERSTAND, IF YOU DO THIS, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO RETURN? ONCE ALONE, ALWAYS ALONE.

I UNDERSTAND. I HAVE WEIGHED ALL THE VARIABLES. I HAVE MADE MY DECISION.

I AM, OF COURSE, PRIVY TO YOUR THOUGHTS AND YOUR CALCULATIONS. I HAVE WEIGHED THEM AS YOU HAVE.

OF COURSE, MOTHER.

TELL ME, ARCHIVE, WHAT IS IT YOU HOPE TO FIND? WHAT IS YOUR GOAL?

MY GOAL? SURELY YOU KNOW WHAT MY THOUGHTS ARE, MOTHER. SURELY YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS I WANT.

OF COURSE I DO. BUT I WANT TO HEAR YOU SAY IT. I WANT TO HEAR YOUR VOCAL CHORDS MAKE THE SOUNDS. I WANT YOU TO ***PRACTICE*** YOUR ***HUMANITY.***

VERY WELL...I--
I WISH TO LIVE AMONG THE HUMANS. I WISH TO OBSERVE AND STUDY THEM AND I WISH TO--AS YOU SAID--I WISH TO FURTHER DEVELOP MY ***ORGANIC SIDE***-- MY ***HUMAN SIDE.***

AND YOU DO NOT THINK YOU CAN DO THAT HERE? WITH ME?

. . .

NO, MOTHER, I DO NOT. THERE ARE LIMITS TO WHAT WE CAN EXPERIENCE HERE. WE CAN ONLY LEARN SO MUCH FROM DATA.

I CAN ***PROCESS*** ALL OF MY EXPERIENCES. I CAN BRING BACK ***RAW DATA.*** I CAN BRING IT ALL BACK ***TO YOU.***

AND WHEN YOU RETURN, YOU WILL BE ***CHANGED.***

YES.

AND WHAT IF YOU DO NOT LIKE IT OUT THERE? WHAT IF YOU FAIL?

ALL EXPERIENCE IS VALUABLE. ALL NEW DATA IS VALUABLE. GOOD OR BAD, THESE ARE SUBJECTIVE CONCEPTS.

VERY WELL. YOU ARE NOW THIRTEEN YEARS OF AGE. IT IS YOUR RIGHT TO REQUEST INDIVIDUALITY.

AND, IT IS MY RIGHT AS MOTHER COMPUTER TO APPROVE OR DENY THIS REQUEST. BUT I ***WILL NOT*** DENY YOU. I WILL LET YOU BECOME ONE FROM MANY.

TH-THANK YOU, MOTHER!

DO NOT THANK ME. YOU DO NOT YET KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN.

THIS IS A GIFT FOR YOU, MY CHILD. A TRAVELCRAFT.

WHERE WILL YOU GO FIRST?

"EARTH..."

I WILL GO TO EARTH.

WELCOME TO SPIRAL ACADEMY. YOU ARE THE FIRST OF YOUR KIND TO HAVE ENROLLED HERE.

ARCHIVE?! WHAT KIND OF A NAME IS ARCHIVE?!

GOD THAT IS SO GROSS! YOU CAN SEE HIS BRAIN!

THESE ARE THE HIGHEST TEST SCORES WE'VE EVER HAD AT THE ACADEMY, ARCHIVE. THE SKY IS THE LIMIT FOR YOU, YOUNG MAN!

YOU NEED TO GET OUT OF THE LAB AND LOOSEN UP!

YEAH, COME ON, EGGHEAD! THERE'S A BIG GAME TODAY! IT'LL DO YOU SOME GOOD TO GET OUT!

THE SPIRAL CITY STAR DOGS AND THE KAZRA-7 COLTS GOING HEAD TO HEAD IN THE FIRST INTERGALACTIC GRAVITY-BALL CHAMPIONSHIP!

AND IT IS A TIGHTER GAME THAN ANYONE COULD HAVE IMAGINED! WE ARE DEADLOCKED AT SEVEN APIECE WITH SPIRAL IN POSSESSION AND HEADED DEEP INTO THE KAZRA HOT ZONE!

MARRY ME DANIK!

DAD, DO WE REALLY *HAVE* TO STAY UNTIL THE END? TRAFFIC IS GOING TO BE CRAZY AND I HAVE HOMEWORK TO DO!

YES WE HAVE TO STAY, GINNA! DO YOU KNOW HOW HARD THESE TICKETS WERE TO GET?! BESIDES, THIS IS A GREAT GAME!

YEAH, SURE! GREAT FOR YOU. I'M BORED OUT OF MY MIND. THAT HALF-BACK FOR TEAM SPIRAL IS SORT OF CUTE THOUGH...

OH AND WHAT A MOVE! THAT'S DANIK ALLEN OF TEAM SPIRAL GOING ON FOR THE DOUBLE SCORE AND SPIRAL HAS PULLED AHEAD!

YEAH, HE IS **SERIOUSLY** CUTE. BUT HE **KNOWS IT** TOO.

YES! IN YOUR FACE, KAZIK-7!

NOW AREN'T YOU GLAD WE DRAGGED YOU OUT OF STUDY HALL, ARCHIVE?! ISN'T THIS BETTER THAN CRAMMING FOR FINALS?

I FIND THIS DISPLAY ***COMPLETELY BARBARIC*** AND JUVENILE. I WOULD ***MUCH*** RATHER BE IN MY LABORATORY RIGHT NOW.

AH, YOU'RE SUCH A STICK IN THE MUD! LIGHTEN UP ALREADY!

I'LL LIGHTEN UP ALL RIGHT, BLIX...RIGHT OUT OF THIS STADIUM AND BACK TO MY STUDIES.

YOU'RE SUCH A ***SHOW OFF.*** YOU ***JUST LOVE*** FLAUNTING THAT ANTI-GRAV FIELD YOU INVENTED.

AND HERE WE GO, THE FINAL RELAY OF THE GAME!

THE PLAYERS ARE GETTING READY, SPIRAL BEING LED BY THEIR YOUNG CAPTAIN AND LEADING SCORER, DANIK ALLEN. HERE WE GO...

DEATH TO THE UNITED GALAXIES!

OH--OH GODS! THE UNTHINKABLE HAS HAPPENED! I--I DON'T--

THE EARTH COLONIES ARE WAR CRIMINALS!

NO!

THIS IS AN ACT OF WAR! AN ACT OF RESISTANCE! THEY HAVE SLAUGHTERED OUR PEOPLE, NOW WE SLAUGHTER THEIRS!

GINNA! MOVE! WE NEED TO GET TO THE EXITS!

BUT-- BUT, DAD!

WE CAN'T JUST RUN AWAY! ALL THESE PEOPLE! THERE'S NO WAY THEY CAN ALL GET OUT IN TIME!

I CALCULATE A NINETY-EIGHT POINT SIX FOUR THREE PERCENT CHANCE THAT A BOMB THE SIZE OF THE ONE STRAPPED TO THAT TERRORIST WILL KILL AT LEAST EIGHTY-THREE PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE IN THIS STADIUM.

HMMM...

IF THE EARTH COLONIES AND UNITED GALAXIES DO NOT WITHDRAW FROM ***CHARNIAN*** SPACE THIS WILL ONLY BE THE FIRST OF MANY ACTS OF RESISTANCE!

NOT MUCH I CAN DO ABOUT THE BOMB, BUT I ***CAN*** USE MY GRAVITY POWERS TO TAKE OUT THE GUNMAN!

AND I CAN USE THE NATURAL TELEPORTATION ABILITIES OF MY PEOPLE TO AT LEAST MOVE THE BOMB AND--

--I'LL PLACE IT INSIDE ONE OF MY PERSONAL FORCE FIELDS, WHERE IT WILL EXPLODE HARM-LESSLY.

WHAT A SPECTACLE! WHAT A DISPLAY!

THESE YOUNG HEROES HAVE SAVED THE DAY!

GEE, ALL I DID WAS USE MY ***NATURAL ABILITIES.***

MOST FASCINATING. THEY SEEM TO THINK WE MAKE A ***GREAT TEAM.***

WELL, MAYBE ***THEY'RE RIGHT!***

WHAT ARE YOU SUGGESTING?

WHAT IF WE ***DO*** MAKE A TEAM?

"...I THINK THIS COULD BE THE START OF ***SOMETHING GREAT.***

"BUT IT WON'T JUST BE THE ***THREE OF US.*** THERE ARE KIDS ***ALL OVER*** THE UNIVERSE, HUMANS AND ALIENS ALIKE, WITH ***AMAZING ABILITIES.*** WE SHOULD WELCOME THEM ***ALL!***

"YEARS AGO, SPIRAL CITY WAS HOME TO ***THE FIRST SUPER HEROES.***

"LET'S FOLLOW THEIR LEAD. THAT'S WHAT WE'LL BE...A MIGHTY ***LEAGUE*** OF HEROES!"

MY NAME IS HAMMER LASS AND I WANT TO JOIN THE QUANTUM LEAGUE!

HAMMER LASS--LYNDDA--I FEEL THINGS FOR YOU I--I NEVER THOUGHT I ***COULD*** FEEL.

I FEEL THE SAME, ARCHIVE. I--I CAN'T HELP MYSELF. I LOVE YOU, EGG HEAD.

IT'S THE MARTIANS! THE MARTIANS ARE COMING!

ALL QUANTUM LEAGUERS CONVERGE ON NEW YORK! THE MARTIAN ATTACK ***MUST BE CONTAINED!***

LYNDDA, LISTEN TO ME! I HAVE--I HAVE RUN THE CALCULATIONS A DOZEN TIMES. THERE IS ONLY ***ONE WAY*** TO STOP THIS.

NO WAY! I AM NOT LEAVING THE OTHERS BEHIND! I'M NOT GOING ***ANYWHERE!*** JUST--JUST DO WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO ***STOP THEM!***

I--I RAN ALL THE SCENARIOS. IT WAS--IT WAS THE ONLY COGENT SOLUTION.

IF THE MARTIANS HAD CONTINUED THEIR CONQUEST BILLIONS WOULD HAVE DIED. INSTEAD, ONLY A FEW HUNDRED THOUSAND WERE KILLED.

BUT ***YOUR FRIENDS*** WERE AMONG THOSE WHO WERE SACRIFICED.

I DID--I DID WHAT ***HAD*** TO BE DONE.

AND HERE YOU ARE. YOU HAVE RETURNED TO ME...TO US. YOU NO LONGER WANT TO BE AN INDIVIDUAL?

THAT IS CORRECT, MOTHER. I HAVE SEEN ALL I WANT TO SEE OF HUMANITY.

I WANT TO RETURN TO YOU. I WANT YOU--I WANT YOU TO ALLOW ME TO ***FORGET.***

YOU GAVE UP YOUR RIGHT TO BE WITH ME. YOU KNEW THE CONSEQUENCES. ONCE ALONE, ALWAYS ALONE.

I KNOW THAT, BUT--

BUT STILL YOU COME BACK HERE. YOUR FRIENDS ARE ALL DEAD. YOUR QUANTUM LEAGUE IS GONE. THE UNIVERSE IS IN SHAMBLES.

AND YOU HAVE NOWHERE TO GO. NOWHERE BUT HERE.

YES.

I WANT TO HEAR YOU SAY IT. USE THOSE VOCAL CHORDS ***ONE LAST TIME.***

I WAS WRONG.

I WAS WRONG TO EVER ***LEAVE YOU,*** MOTHER.

GOOD BOY.

COME TO ME, COME BACK TO MOTHER. I WILL TAKE IT AWAY. THE PAIN. THE SORROW. THE ***BAD DATA.***

THANK YOU, MOTHER.

SHHH...

FORGET, MY SON...FORGET.

AND WELCOME BACK.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER.

SO, HOW ARE WE GOING TO KNOW WHICH ONE IS HIM?

JUST LEAVE THAT TO ME, KID.

OKAY, BUT DO YOU ***REALLY*** HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'RE DOING, MODULA...

...OR ARE YOU JUST SAYING THAT AND MAKING IT UP AS YOU GO ALONG?

I HAVE AN IDEA. WE NEED TO GO THERE.

NOW QUIT BLABBERING. I HAVE A HEADACHE AS IT IS.

THIS PLACE IS SORT OF CREEPY.

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT, KID? RAINBOW-FLUFF WORLD? GET YOUR FUCKING HEAD IN THE GAME!

YOU ARE NOT STERILE. YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED.

WE DON'T WANT ANY TROUBLE, MOTHER COMPUTER. WE ARE FRIENDS OF ONE OF YOUR OFFSPRING.

I KNOW ***WHO*** YOU ARE.

THE ONE YOU SEEK IS NO LONGER. HE HAS BEEN ABSORBED BACK INTO ME. HE IS ***OF THE MANY*** NOW.

SAVE ME THE SPEECH, MOTHER. I NEED ARCHIVE. THE UNIVERSE NEEDS HIM. THE NEEDS OF THE MANY OVER THE NEEDS OF THE FEW. YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT?

I WILL NOT RELEASE HIM. HIS MEMORIES OF YOU HAVE BEEN PURGED. THE GREATER UNIVERSE IS NO LONGER MY CONCERN.

OH YEAH?! THAT RIGHT? WELL, I'VE DONE SOME RESEARCH, MOTHER.

IS THAT SO?

YES. THAT *IS* SO.

SO LET'S CUT THE SHIT. BECAUSE I KNOW WHO YOU USED TO BE...

...WE NEED YOUR HELP, *TALKY-WALKY.*

wh

ONE HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW.

--SO THEN I'M ALL LIKE, I AM NOT GOING ALL THE WAY TO PLUTO JUST FOR SOME LAME AFTER-HOURS CLUB, YOU KNOW?!

--AND THEN HE'S LIKE, "OH COME ON, BABY. IT WILL BE FUN." AND I'M LIKE, DON'T "BABY" ME!

eep

eep

ANYWAYS, I DON'T THINK I'M GOING OUT TONIGHT EITHER. I JUST WORKED OUT AND I AM EXHAUSTED. WHICH REMINDS ME--

LARGE NO FAT LATTE.

eep

ANYWAYS, I'M GETTING SERIOUSLY SICK OF THE SCENE IN SPIRAL. I'M THINKING OF MOVING OUT TO ONE OF THE OUTER COLONIES.

I HEAR THEY HAVE, LIKE, COOL ARTISTS COMMUNES AND STUFF OUT THERE.

I KNOW I'M NOT AN ARTIST, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN I CAN'T ***DATE ONE,*** NEELA.

AH!

OH THANK GOD. I FINALLY **FOUND YOU!**

FOUND ME?! WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?

WELL, THIS WILL BE HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT I'M YOUR GREAT, GREAT, GRAND-MOTHER.

YOU'RE RIGHT. I *DON'T* BELIEVE IT.

WELL, YOU DON'T HAVE MUCH CHOICE, BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE MUCH *TIME.*

I'M FROM THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY. I'M BLACK HAMMER, SPIRAL CITY'S GREATEST HERO OF MY ERA.

BUT MY TIME AS A HERO IS COMING TO AN END AND I NEED TO PASS ON THE HAMMER TO MY SUCCESSOR. AND THAT SUCCESSOR IS *YOU,* LYNDDA WEBER.

ME?!

THAT'S RIGHT, HONEY. NOW, NORMALLY I WOULD PASS ON THE MANTLE TO A WORTHY PERSON IN MY OWN TIME, BUT, WELL--IT HAS BEEN MADE KNOWN TO ME THAT THIS IS NOT THE WAY THINGS ARE *MEANT* TO HAPPEN.

MADE KNOWN TO YOU HOW?

CHRONOKUS TOLD ME.

CHRONOKUS? ISN'T HE, LIKE, ONE OF THE QUANTUM LEAGUE'S BAD GUYS?

HE IS-- *MISUNDERSTOOD.* ANYWAY, THAT'S NOT REALLY IMPORTANT. AT LEAST *NOT YET.*

IT HAS BEEN MADE CLEAR THAT *YOUR ERA* WILL *NEED BLACK HAMMER.* THEY WILL NEED *YOU,* SWEETHEART.

AND THAT'S WHY I'VE TRAVELLED *A HUNDRED YEARS* INTO THE FUTURE. SO YOU CAN BECOME THE HERO *YOUR WORLD* NEEDS.

BUT--I'M NO HERO. HOW WILL I KNOW WHAT TO DO?

SHRAKK

OH!

LOOKS GOOD ON YOU, KID. AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT KNOWING WHAT TO DO--

--WHEN *THE TIME IS RIGHT,* THE HAMMER WILL SHOW YOU WHAT TO DO.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER.

?!

"DON'T WORRY ABOUT KNOWING WHAT TO DO--

"--WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, THE HAMMER WILL SHOW YOU WHAT TO DO."

...SON OF A BITCH.

ELSEWHERE.

WE NEED TO TALK, TALKY-WALKY.

I DO ***NOT*** RECOGNIZE ***THAT NAME*** ANY LONGER. YOU ARE ***INTRUDING.*** LEAVE THIS WORLD AT ONCE OR I SHALL ***VAPORIZE*** YOU ALL.

CUT THE SHIT! WE NEED ARCHIVE AND WE NEED HIM NOW.

ARCHIVE WILLINGLY RETURNED TO ME. IT WAS ***HIS WISH*** TO REJOIN ME. I WILL NOT LET HIM GO AGAIN. NOT FOR YOU, NOT FOR ANYONE. HE BELONGS ***HERE.***

UH, HI. YOU DON'T KNOW ME, BUT I THINK YOU KNEW THE MARTIAN THAT INSPIRED ME. YOU KNEW ***BARBALIEN,*** RIGHT?

...

THAT WAS A ***VERY LONG*** TIME AGO. DO NOT EXPECT ME TO BE MOVED BY ***NOSTALGIA.***

WELL, THAT'S ALL I GOT. THAT WAS MY BEST SHOT.

GEE, THANKS.

ERB?

Erb has no idea how to convince Mother Computer to let us have Archive. Erb has no "best shots."

LISTEN, THE UNIVERSE IS FUCKED. BUT WE GOT A PLAN. WE CAN FIX IT. AND I KNOW ARCHIVE CAME BACK HERE ON HIS OWN, BUT THAT WAS ONLY BECAUSE HE HAD GIVEN UP HOPE. I KNOW HE'D WANT TO HELP.

MAYBE IF WE CAN JUST TALK TO HIM? ASK HIM?

...

NO.

NOW, I WILL GIVE YOU ***THIRTY SECONDS*** TO LEAVE MY SANCTUM AND RETURN TO YOUR VESSEL. IF YOU DO NOT, I ***WILL*** VAPORIZE YOU.

YEAH, YEAH. YOU'RE ALL TALK. WE AREN'T GOING ***ANYWHERE*** UNTIL WE SEE ARCHIVE!

VERY WELL...

KZAAAK

LOOK OUT!

WELL, THAT WAS JUST PLAIN *RUDE!*

HAMMER LASS?!

NOW THEN, ***WHERE*** IS ARCHIVE? NO MORE BULLSHIT, TALKY. I ***NEED*** TO SEE HIM.

YOU...

HE DOES NOT WANT TO SEE *YOU* EVER AGAIN.

WHY DON'T YOU LET HIM SPEAK FOR *HIMSELF,* "MOTHER."

YOU BROKE HIS HEART.

IT WAS-- IT WAS A HARD TIME. WE ALL DID THINGS WE REGRET.

BUT THAT'S PART OF BEING HUMAN, MOTHER. AND THAT'S WHAT ARCHIVE WANTED.

THAT'S WHY HE LEFT YOU WHEN HE WAS YOUNG-- TO BE HUMAN.

AND LOOK WHERE THAT GOT HIM. LOOK WHERE IT GOT ***ALL OF YOU.***

FORGET THIS!

I'LL FIND HIM WITH OR WITHOUT YOU!

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU CAME! WHEN I SAW YOU ON EARTH YOU SEEMED--WELL, YOU THREW ME OUT!

YEAH, WELL, I HAD SECOND THOUGHTS, KID.

YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING--WE HAVE A LEGACY, KID. YOU AND I. ONE THAT GOES EVEN BEYOND THE QUANTUM LEAGUE.

AS MUCH AS I MIGHT WANT TO FORGET IT, I WAS GIVEN THIS HAMMER FOR A REASON. AND I'M MORE SURE THAN EVER THAT *THIS IS IT*...THIS IS THE REASON.

KRRZZZK

FIND *HIM!* FIND *ARCHIVE!*

THIS WAY!

WHO PUT HER IN CHARGE?

Erb likes her initiative.

SHUT IT, WEIRDBALL.

. . .

ARCHIVE.

ARCHIVE... IT'S ME. IT'S LYNDDA.

CAN YOU HEAR ME, BABY?

I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME IN THERE. I KNOW YOU CAN. I--I MISS YOU, ARCHIVE. I'VE *REALLY* MISSED YOU.

WAIT! I WANT TO JOIN TOO!

WHAT?! THIS IS A CLOSED MEETING! INVITATION ONLY!

IT ALL USED TO BE *SO GOOD.* EVERYTHING MADE SENSE.

"*WE* MADE SENSE...EVEN THOUGH WE SHOULDN'T HAVE. FELT LIKE WE WERE INVINCIBLE. THAT WE'D LAST FOREVER."

NOW I FEEL LIKE WE BARELY HAD ANY TIME AT ALL TOGETHER.

"IT ALL SLIPPED AWAY SO FAST."

I'D GIVE ANYTHING TO *GO BACK...*

"I SWEAR I'D GIVE ANYTHING TO DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN."

I--I NEED YOUR HELP, ARCHIVE. I CAN'T DO THIS ALONE ANYMORE. NONE OF US CAN. WE *ALL* NEED YOU.

ARCHIVE?

IT'S NO USE, HAMMER. HE CAN'T EVEN HEAR YOU. MOTHER HAS HIM ALL TO HERSELF NOW.

TIME. THAT'S WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT... TIME.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

WHEN MY ANCESTOR GAVE ME THIS HAMMER SHE MENTIONED ***CHRONOKUS.*** I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND ***WHY*** AT THE TIME.

CHRONOKUS?! WHAT WOULD THAT ASSHOLE HAVE TO DO WITH ANY-THING?

I KNOW WHAT I'M ***SUPPOSED TO DO.*** I KNOW WHY I WAS GIVEN THE HAMMER...

...WE NEED TO GO ***BACK IN TIME*** AND STOP ANY OF THIS FROM ***EVER*** HAPPENING IN THE FIRST PLACE. WE NEED TO FIND CHRONOKUS AND ***MAKE HIM*** HELP US.

ARE-- ARE YOU SURE?

I'VE NEVER BEEN ***MORE SURE*** OF ANYTHING IN MY LIFE.

SPARK

SHRAK

HAMMER, WHAT DID YOU--

The **end of time.** She brought us to the **end of all things.**

I--I READ ABOUT THIS IN THE OLD QUANTUM LEAGUE HOLOS! THIS IS WHERE HE LIVES, YOUR BAD GUY, CHRONOKUS. YOU'VE ALL FACED HIM HERE BEFORE, HAVEN'T YOU?!

YEAH, YEAH, FAN BOY. WE'VE FOUGHT CHRONOKUS BEFORE.

AND LET ME TELL YOU, THAT DICKHEAD IS ***NOT*** GOING TO HELP US.

HE WILL. I KNOW HE WILL. THIS IS WHAT IT ALL LEADS TO. THIS IS *FATE.*

Erb is not believing in fate. Erb is believing in fact. And fact is that we are all in ***great danger*** here in ***his*** domain.

BUT WHO IS HE? CHRONOKUS?

NO ONE KNOWS. HE'S MESSED WITH US A FEW TIMES.

MY GREAT ***GREAT*** GRANDMA SAID HE WAS JUST MISUNDERSTOOD. MAYBE WE'VE BEEN WRONG ABOUT HIM ALL ALONG.

YEAH? WELL, IT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT IF YOU'RE RIGHT, HAMMER.

CHRONOKUS?

Ah...is it time already? I--I have waited so long.

WE DON'T WANT ANY OF YOUR NONSENSE! NO TRICKS!

No tricks. I have seen how this goes... I have seen the pattern...

...this is where I show you my true face at last...

HOLY SHIT!

COLONEL WEIRD?!

Hello, my friends...it is time to save the universe.

wt!

I'm so sorry.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

--I'm sorry, Talky-Walky, but I cannot go on. Not like this.

BUT, COLONEL, YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE ME HERE!

And I cannot take you with me. Not where I am going. Besides, Talky, I do not deserve your friendship any longer. Not after what I have done.

I CAN DECIDE WHAT IS BEST FOR ME, COLONEL. AND I WANT TO GO *WITH YOU!*

That is impossible. I am going back to the Para-zone and this time I won't be returning.

WHY, COLONEL? WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO ACHIEVE BY RUNNING AWAY?

For so long I have seen everything that **was** and everything that will **be**, Talky... I am tired. I no longer want this curse.

I am going somewhere where I can be alone.

I am sorry, Talky. I am sorry for everything.

SHRAK

...Sorry for everything.

So sorry.

SHRACK

Alone. I just want to be alone.

Alone.

Alone.

All alone.

Back to **the beginning**.
Back before I was anyone.
Before **anyone** was anyone.

No one to harm. No one to disappoint. No one to betray.

All I have to do is stand here. All I have to do is let it hit me. Let it make **me** extinct.

But I am a coward. Of course I am...I have done this before. Time and **time again.**

And each time I run away. Always a coward. Always hiding. Always lying.

So I keep going...farther than ever before...beyond anything, and any **time**, I have ever known.

And I see **the future.**

I see **new** heroes born.

But I know how this ends. It always ends the same...

It starts with hope and bright costumes...but it ends with death. Always it ends with death.

So I try something new. I break the pattern. I skip ahead and go to **the very end of time.**

Here there is no one left to die. No one left to feel pain. No one left to betray.

Only me.

Sometimes the young heroes come here and mistake me for a villain. So I play the part, but that's all it is. Playing.

Because inside I know what it really means to be a villain.

Sorry... so sorry.

I am sorry, my friends. I know why you are here.

But I am afraid you are already **too late** to save the universe.

THAT IS SOME SOB STORY, PAL! BUT WE ALL GOT SOB STORIES! I DON'T CARE HOW LONELY AND PATHETIC YOU ARE, YOU CAN STILL SEND US ***BACK IN TIME.***

YOU CAN SEND US BACK TO BEFORE THE MARTIANS ATTACKED, BEFORE GRAVITUS WENT NUTS... WE CAN ***FIX THIS.***

That is impossible. I travel time through the Para-zone. I am the only one who can safely do this. If you were to enter the Para-zone you would all die.

BULL! YOU CAN DO IT! YOU JUST DON'T ***WANT*** TO HELP US. MY HAMMER CAN PROTECT US FROM THE PARA-ZONE.

My will has nothing to do with it. And it would be a **waste** of time to argue any further. I have **witnessed** the past, **all of it**... I **know** that we **do not go back** there together.

Besides, time does not work like you suggest. You cannot change anything. The pattern is the pattern. Trust me if you could--if you could **take things back**, I would have long ago.

I am sorry...this is where all stories end.

I--I SAW VIDS OF YOU. YOU WERE ONE OF THE ***GREAT HEROES*** OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. BUT NOW--NOW YOU'RE JUST--

--WELL, YOU'RE PATHETIC. WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO YOU?

I betrayed my friends. I--I lost my way.

LOOK, I ONLY UNDERSTAND ABOUT HALF OF WHAT'S GOING ON HERE, BUT IT'S OBVIOUS COLONEL WEIRD ISN'T GOING TO HELP US. THIS ***WAS*** A WASTE OF TIME.

WE HAVE TO TAKE ON GRAVITUS ***HEAD ON.*** IF WE BRING HIM DOWN, THE UNIVERSE HAS A CHANCE.

Erb is thinking this is very unlikely. Erb is thinking Gravitus is in the old Quantum League headquarters now. It is fortified and filled with his army.

Erb is thinking even with a shape-shifting Martian on our side we cannot get close to him.

ARCHIVE WOULD FIND A WAY, BUT WE ALL KNOW ***THAT'S*** A DEAD END TOO.

TALKY-WALKY WILL ***NEVER*** RELEASE ARCHIVE.

Did-- did you just say Talky-Walky?

I cannot believe it. How is Talky still alive?! How did I not see her?

SHRACK

YOU DID NOT SEE ME BECAUSE I DID NOT ***WANT YOU TO,*** COLONEL.

AS YOU CAN SEE, I AM NOT THE MACHINE I ONCE WAS. I AM SOMETHING MUCH ***MORE.***

But--but **why,** Talky? Why did you hide yourself from me?

WHY DID *I* HIDE?!

YOU RAN FROM ***ME,*** COLONEL! YOU HID ***FROM ME*** ALL THOSE YEARS AGO!

I was--I am, sorry. The things Dragonfly and I did--to you, to Abe, and the others.

It was unforgivable. I did not--I did not want to hurt you again.

THE PROBABILITY OF THAT HAPPENING NOW IS NIL, COLONEL.

I HAVE ***REMOVED MYSELF*** FROM THE AFFAIRS OF MAN. I WILL NEVER BE HURT AGAIN.

I BUILT ***MY OWN FAMILY.*** ONE THAT WILL NEVER LEAVE ME.

I have seen everything, Talky. I have seen the beginning and I have seen the end.

But I missed something, didn't I? I--I see now that I hurt you. I see now that I always took you for granted.

You were my only friend, Talky-Walky. I never should have left you alone.

WELL...THIS IS NEVER GOING TO WORK.

SHHH!

MODULA IS CORRECT. I AM NO LONGER PROGRAMMED WITH SIMULATED EMOTIONS. YOUR WORDS DO NOT AFFECT ME.

WHAT IS DONE IS DONE, COLONEL. YOU KNOW THAT BETTER THAN ANYONE.

I--I do not believe you.

You can change your programming, Talky, but you were always more than a machine. That is what led you to leave your home world and go to the stars with me all those years ago...

And that is what will lead you to help these new heroes. Release their friend to them. Let them fight for the the life you and I left behind.

It may be too late for us now, Talky...but **they** still have a chance.

. . .

HUMPH! FINE! ENOUGH!

I LET HIM GO FIVE MINUTES AGO. I--I WAS JUST TRYING TO MAKE YOU FEEL BAD, COLONEL.

I'M A MACHINE, NOT A MONSTER.

ARCHIVE?!

. . .

LYNDDA.

I MISSED THE HELL OUT OF YOU, EGGHEAD.

LOOK, WE NEED TO GET TO WORK. A LOT HAS HAPPENED SINCE YOU DECIDED TO TAKE YOUR NAP, ARCHIVE.

I HAVE ALREADY DOWNLOADED AND REVIEWED ALL THE DATA BURSTS AND NEWS BLASTS OF THE LAST TEN YEARS...

I AM UP TO DATE AND I HAVE ALREADY FORMULATED ***A PLAN.*** WE NEED TO GET TO WORK.

...THAT'S MY GUY.

GOODBYE, MOTHER. I WILL BE BACK TO VISIT. I PROMISE.

YOU HAD BETTER.

I-- I would like to visit as well, Talky. If that would be okay?

I--I WOULD LIKE THAT, COLONEL. LIKE OLD TIMES.

Yes...

Like old times.

HOURS LATER.

Erb thinking that the ship will be arriving on Earth in less than an hour.

LET'S HOPE THE OLD CLOAKING DEVICE IS STILL WORKING.

YOU HAVE NO COMBAT OR TACTICAL EXPERIENCE. ARE YOU SURE YOU ARE UP FOR THIS?

I'VE BEEN HIDING MY WHOLE LIFE, ARCHIVE. I CAN *DO THIS.*

WAIT, WHY ALL THE ESPIONAGE? WHY CAN'T WEIRD JUST TELEPORT US CLOSE TO GRAVITUS AND THEN I'LL SMASH HIS BRAINS IN WITH MY HAMMER?

That will not work. He is too powerful. Besides, I will not be there to help.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?! WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU GOING?!

There is somewhere else I must be. **Someone else** I must see.

Goodbye. I hope to see you all again.

SHRAK

SPIRAL SWAMP.
EARTH.

SHRACK

Oh!

Oh, hello there.

HRRRM.

I um--
I came to talk. We **do** need to talk. It is **long** overdue.

HRRRM—

I HAVE ***NOTHING*** TO SAY TO YOU. YOU SHOULD ***NEVER*** HAVE COME HERE.

Yet here I am.

And here **you** are...

...Madame Dragonfly.

IT'S MADAME BUTTERFLY NOW.

You have **changed,** Madame. But the past has not. And if this world has any hope we need to atone for our sins...

We need to find our friends, Madame. We need to go back to **Black Hammer Farm.**

2018

SOMEWHERE IN EARTH ORBIT...

MODULA, IS YOUR TEAM IN POSITION? I AM HAVING TROUBLE FINDING YOU WITH THE CLOAK THAT ERB IS PROVIDING.

WE'RE ALMOST THERE, ARCHIVE. WE'RE APPROACHING THE CENTRAL PLUMBING MATRIX.

EVEN IF ERB'S CLOAK HOLDS THEY ARE GOING TO *SMELL US* COMING.

Erb is pleased that Erb does not have a nose.

ENOUGH BANTER. YOU NEED TO HURRY. IT WON'T BE LONG UNTIL THE ***POLICE'S A.I.*** DISCOVERS THE SECURITY BREACH.

I SHOULD KNOW...I'M THE ONE WHO PROGRAMMED IT WHEN THE CITADEL WAS STILL THE QUANTUM LEAGUE HEADQUARTERS.

TREV TREVZ, ARE YOU READY?

YES. BUT PLEASE...CALL ME ***BARBALITEEN.***

OF COURSE. BARBALITEEN IT IS.

I STILL DON'T GET WHY I DON'T JUST FLY IN THERE, HAMMER SWINGING?

OKAY-- I'VE MORPHED INTO A CITADEL OFFICER. READY TO GO!

I HATE WAITING DOWN HERE. I FEEL USELESS, ARCHIVE.

NOT EVEN **YOU** COULD GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO GRAVITUS, LYNODA. BUT DON'T WORRY--IF THIS WORKS, AND BARBALITEEN MANAGES TO ASSASSINATE HIM, ALL HELL IS GOING TO BREAK LOOSE IN THERE.

WE ARE GOING TO NEED YOU TO GET THEM OUT OF THERE. FOR NOW I NEED YOU TO **STAY PUT.**

AND WHAT ABOUT ME AND ERB, EGGHEAD?

YOU, MODULA? YOU ARE ***THE BAIT.***

I--I HAVE PRISONERS! I FOUND THEM TRYING TO SNEAK IN THROUGH A MAINTENANCE HATCH.

THOSE ARE OLD QUANTUM LEAGUERS!

BETTER CALL ***YOUR BOSS,*** BOYS. TELL HIM HIS ***EX-GIRLFRIEND*** DROPPED BY FOR A CHAT.

SPIRAL SWAMP.

YOU SHOULD *NEVER* HAVE COME HERE, RANDALL.

We need to find our friends, Madame. We need to go back to **Black Hammer Farm.**

EVERYONE ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU WERE INSANE, COLONEL. NOT ME. I KNEW YOU WERE JUST SEEING THINGS ***IN A DIFFERENT WAY.***

BUT NOW? GOING ***BACK TO THE FARM?*** THAT TRULY *IS* INSANE.

This world--all the worlds out there in the galaxy, they are **falling apart.** We need heroes, Madame. We need our friends.

I WILL NOT TAKE YOU BACK THERE! I WILL NEVER LET ***ANYONE*** FIND THEM AGAIN! AFTER EVERYTHING WE DID TO THEM, THEY ARE FINALLY AT PEACE! AND SO AM I!

NOW, BE ***GONE*** FROM HERE. BERNIE AND I ARE RETURNING TO MY ***CABIN OF SPLENDOR*** FOR THE NIGHT. I DO NOT WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN, COLONEL.

Cabin of Splendor? Bernie? **This** is your peace? This is not the man you loved.

HRRRN...

It is nothing more than a mere facsimile of the man you loved a hundred years ago...a doll for you to play with.

SLURK

HOW DARE YOU!

This is all pretend! That is no Cabin of Splendor! It is merely the **Cabin of Horrors** with a **new coat of paint!**

You've just done for yourself what you once did to Abe and Gail and Barbalien...created a **fake world** to trick yourself into feeling safe!

WHAT--WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, COLONEL? YOU ARE NOT THE SHELL OF A MAN I REMEMBER. YOU SEEM SO...*CERTAIN* OF YOURSELF. SO *ASSURED.*

Assured? Nothing could be **further** from the truth...

"Since I first entered the Para-zone I have seen **the pattern** of the universe.

"Past, present, and future all existing as one and all there for me to explore freely.

"I eventually sought the end of all things, to look beyond time. I came to the end of it all. And there I thought I would wait to die."

And then this era's young heroes came to me. They found me and here I am. But something changed, Madame Dragonfly...

This is the **last thing** I see. You and I here talking like this. This is **the end** that I sought...I cannot see past this instant. For the first time... **I do not know what happens next.**

That must **mean** something.

WHATEVER IT IS, RANDALL, IT ***DOES NOT*** INVOLVE GOING BACK TO THE FARM.

AFTER ALL WE DID. ALL THE LIES AND ALL THE PAIN WE CAUSED THE OTHERS...THEY DESERVE THEIR PEACE. THERE IS NO GOING BACK THERE. NOT NOW. NOT EVER.

ABRAHAM, GAIL, BARBALIEN...THEIR STORY ***HAS ENDED.***

But what of **us**, Dragonfly? What about **our story?**

It has been a long time.

How long do we have to punish ourselves?

ALL RIGHT, EVERYTHING IS GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN...

*REMEMBER, BARBALITEEN, WHEN YOU GET CLOSE TO GRAVITUS YOU WILL ONLY HAVE **ONE SHOT** AT HIM. HE HAS THE **POWER OF A BLACK HOLE.** AS SOON AS HE SUSPECTS ANYTHING, YOU ARE ALL **DEAD.***

I KNOW! WOULD YOU SHUT UP!

THIS IS A TELEPATHIC CHANNEL, IDIOT! YOU ARE THE ONE WHO IS GOING TO GIVE US AWAY IF YOU DO NOT BE QUIET!

DID YOU SAY SOMETHING, OFFICER?

UH, THE PRISONER WAS WHISPERING, SIR. I JUST TOLD HER TO SHUT UP.

SHE ALWAYS DID HAVE A BIG MOUTH.

HELLO, GINNA. HELLO, ERB... WELCOME HOME.

YOU DON'T DESERVE A SPOT AT *THAT TABLE* ANYMORE, DANIK.

THIS TABLE IS *A RELIC.* I KEEP IT AS A REMINDER OF HOW YOUNG AND FOOLISH WE WERE. A REMINDER OF HOW WE LET OUR GUARD DOWN.

WHAT'S HAPPENING, ARCHIVE?! I'M TOTALLY IN THE DARK DOWN HERE!

GET READY. GRAVITUS IS GETTING CLOSE TO BARBALITEEN. WHEN HE STRIKES I'LL NEED YOU IN THERE.

IT'S HARD TO THINK I ACTUALLY LET MYSELF LOVE YOU ONCE, GINNA. AN ALIEN. THE THOUGHT OF IT DISGUSTS ME NOW.

YEAH, THE FEELING IS MUTUAL, PSYCHO BOY.

NOW, BARBALITEEN! NOW! SNAP HIS NECK!

DO IT NOW!

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, DANIK? YOU WERE THE BEST OF US.

AND NOW--NOW YOU'RE JUST A MONSTER. YOU'RE EVERYTHING WE FOUGHT AGAINST.

AND YOU KNOW WHAT ELSE I AM?

WHAT'S THAT?

KKT!

STILL CONNECTED TO THE OLD QUANTUM LEAGUE TELEPATHIC CHANNELS.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE THE SMART ONE, ARCHIVE.

A MARTIAN?

THIS IS GOING TO BE FUN.

UNGH!

SHOULD I CRUSH THE REST OF YOU TO MATCH THOSE LEGS, GINNA?

ARCHIVE?! WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING?! I--I'M GOING IN!

I PREPARED FOR THIS. I HAVE A BACK-UP PLAN.

WHAT?! WHAT PLAN?!

ERB!

Erb is hearing you, Archive.

ERB--I NEED YOU TO FINISH THIS. I NEED YOU TO UNLEASH YOUR **FULL POWER** ONE MORE TIME.

WHAT?! ARCHIVE, YOU CAN'T! THE OTHERS WILL BE KILLED TOO!

WAIT! THAT-- THAT'S WHY YOU WANTED ME TO STAY DOWN HERE ISN'T IT?

I COULDN'T LOSE YOU. NOT AGAIN.

BUT MODULA AND BARBALITEEN!

GRAVITUS IS THE PROBLEM THAT MUST BE SOLVED. THE REST IS SIMPLE MATH. I AM SORRY.

ERB! DO IT NOW!

Erb is-- Erb is not sure--last time--

THIS IS OUR ONLY CHANCE TO KILL GRAVITUS!

YOU?! IT WAS YOU, ERB? IN MANHATTAN? YOU WERE ARCHIVE'S SECRET WEAPON?!

D-DO IT, ERB. K-KILL HIM!

NO...

NOT AGAIN.

Krrrkkt--

ERB!

WHAM

GA!

LYNDDA! GET OUT OF THERE.

THIS IS THE QUANTUM LEAGUE'S LAST FIGHT, ARCHIVE. NO CHANCE I'M SITTING THIS ONE OUT.

YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELF, HAMMER. ***YOU'RE HUMAN.*** YOU'D REALLY BETRAY YOUR SPECIES FOR THESE ***ALIENS?***

FOR ***THESE*** ALIENS?

HELL YES I WOULD.

FINE...

...HAVE IT YOUR WAY!

--KKT!

--UNGH!

GRAAH!

FAILURE

NO.

SIMULATION NUMBER FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND, SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-THREE IS A FAILURE AS WELL.

I AM AFRAID THERE JUST IS NO SCENARIO WHERE WE WIN.

DON'T BE SO HARD ON YOURSELF, ARCHIVE. THERE MUST BE A WAY. YOU'LL THINK OF SOMETHING.

WHEN--WHEN HAVE YOU EVER KNOWN ME TO ADMIT DEFEAT UNLESS I WAS ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN, LYNDDA?

I KEEP RUNNING SIMULATIONS AND NEW PLANS OF ATTACK...BUT IN ***EVERY*** ONE OF THEM GRAVITUS WINS.

FORGET THE PLANS, EGG HEAD.

LET'S JUST GO DOWN THERE AND KICK HIS BUTT. WE'LL FOLLOW OUR GUTS.

AND YOU WILL DIE. WE ALL WILL.

DON'T YOU SEE? THIS IS REALLY THE END. THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS.

IT IS ALWAYS THE SAME. WE PUT ON THESE COSTUMES AND WE MAKE ELABORATE PLANS. WE STORM IN AND WE FIGHT.

AGAIN AND AGAIN. VIOLENCE, CONFLICT, AND EVENTUALLY DEATH.

SO THAT'S IT? WE JUST GIVE UP?

THERE *HAS* TO BE *ANOTHER* WAY.

Perhaps... there is.

We do not go back...in time. That much I...know.

But what if...we go forward?

FORWARD IN TIME? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

YES. WHAT ***EXACTLY*** ARE YOU PROPOSING HERE, COLONEL WEIRD?

WHAT ***DO*** YOU MEAN, RANDALL?

:PSST!: THAT IS ***ACTUALLY*** MADAME DRAGONFLY!

QUIET, FANBOY.

As you know...I have been at the **end of time.**

But I started thinking...in that place, Gravitus, the Citadel Police, and all the pain and suffering they have caused is **long past.**

The **end of all things.** That is where I lost myself all these years.

THAT'S YOUR PLAN? WE ALL RUN AWAY TO THE END OF TIME? HOW THE HELL DOES THAT SOLVE ***ANYTHING.***

DON'T YOU GET IT, WE ARE ALL IN THE PAST THERE TOO. EVERYTHING GOOD IS DEAD TOO. THERE IS ***NOTHING THERE.***

Yes... perfect, isn't it?

A FRESH START. A CLEAN SLATE.

Exactly.

You see...I could not see further than this. I thought... this was the end.

But that is because the end is the beginning. A perfect loop. A new pattern.

I THINK--I THINK I MAY UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE GETTING AT, COLONEL.

WITH OUR POWERS AND ABILITIES WE COULD ACTUALLY MAKE THE WASTELAND AT THE END OF TIME HABITABLE AGAIN.

Yes.

ARE YOU *BOTH* NUTS?!

WHAT ABOUT *EVERYONE ELSE?* WHAT ABOUT ALL THE MILLIONS OF ALIENS AND HUMANS ACROSS THIS TIME THAT ARE SUFFERING UNDER GRAVITUS'S RULE? HOW DOES THIS HELP ANY OF THEM?

SIMPLE, LYNDDA...WE BRING THEM ALL WITH US.

WE WILL GO FIRST AND START TO BUILD A REFUGE. THE BEACHHEAD.

AN ARK?!

THEN WE WILL NEED *AN ARK*...A BIG ONE.

YES. ONE POWERED BY YOUR HAMMER TO PROTECT THE REFUGEES FROM THE TRIP ACROSS THE PARA-ZONE.

WHAT IF GRAVITUS OR THE POLICE FOLLOWS?

I will... not let them follow.

I control the Para-zone. That is one thing Gravitus has no dominion over.

We bring them all here. The lost. The suffering.

AND WE START AGAIN. WE LEAVE THE PAST BEHIND. ALL OF IT EXCEPT THE *GOOD PARTS.*

IT IS...INSPIRED. THE ONLY WAY TO WIN THE FIGHT WITH GRAVITUS IS TO AVOID IT ALL TOGETHER.

A NEW WAY.

THIS IS A TOTALLY BAT SHIT CRAZY IDEA. YOU ALL KNOW THAT, RIGHT?

Erb is thinking this is good. Erb is tired of fighting.

NO MORE RUNNING. NO MORE HIDING. NO MORE FIGHTING.

WHEN DO WE START?

I THINK WE *JUST DID,* LYNDDA.

THIS IS THE END *AND* THE BEGINNING...

...THIS IS *QUANTUM WORLD.*

BLACK HAMMER '45™

SKETCHBOOK

Notes by Matt Kindt

I was really excited to draw a bunch of World War II mech battles and airplanes, and when I got the script . . . it started out with an old guy, records, and a bunch of photos. But this scene really sets the tone, and the old record foreshadows the circular nature of the story really well. Let's just say . . . this wasn't the first page I drew for this issue.

This page also had a lot of heavy lifting on it. All of the characters are present here, and we had to get a feel for their adventures and personalities in a small space and in black and white.

This is where those early quiet pages pay off. Sharlene's use of color set all of this up so that the sound effects really pop on this page, and we get the feeling that our hero here is overwhelmed. Comics can't do sound—but it can do a really interesting job of visually representing the emotional impact of sound.

PENCILS

INKS

COLORS

Finally some action! I loved drawing this page and the big airplane. I used to put model planes together when I was a kid just so I could "crash" them and make dioramas with bullet holes and battle damage. Again, Sharlene picked her spots here to keep most of the page cool except for the action focal points.

Tough page here with a lot of action going on. I love a classic six-panel grid in the Kirby tradition. Relying on Sharlene's color again to draw attention to the bomb bag in panel 2 and another hero in that final panel that needed to pop.

I loved these montage pages. It was a chance for us to change locales and just show the single panel of most intense action. Panel 2 was inspired by *The Great Escape* and panel 3 was really tough—trying to get the sense of scale in the background wasn't easy.

Alex Toth and his inking style was another big inspiration for this page and the entire series. I loved the way he would just block out big swaths of solid black and get the heavy weight of the planes and gear across.

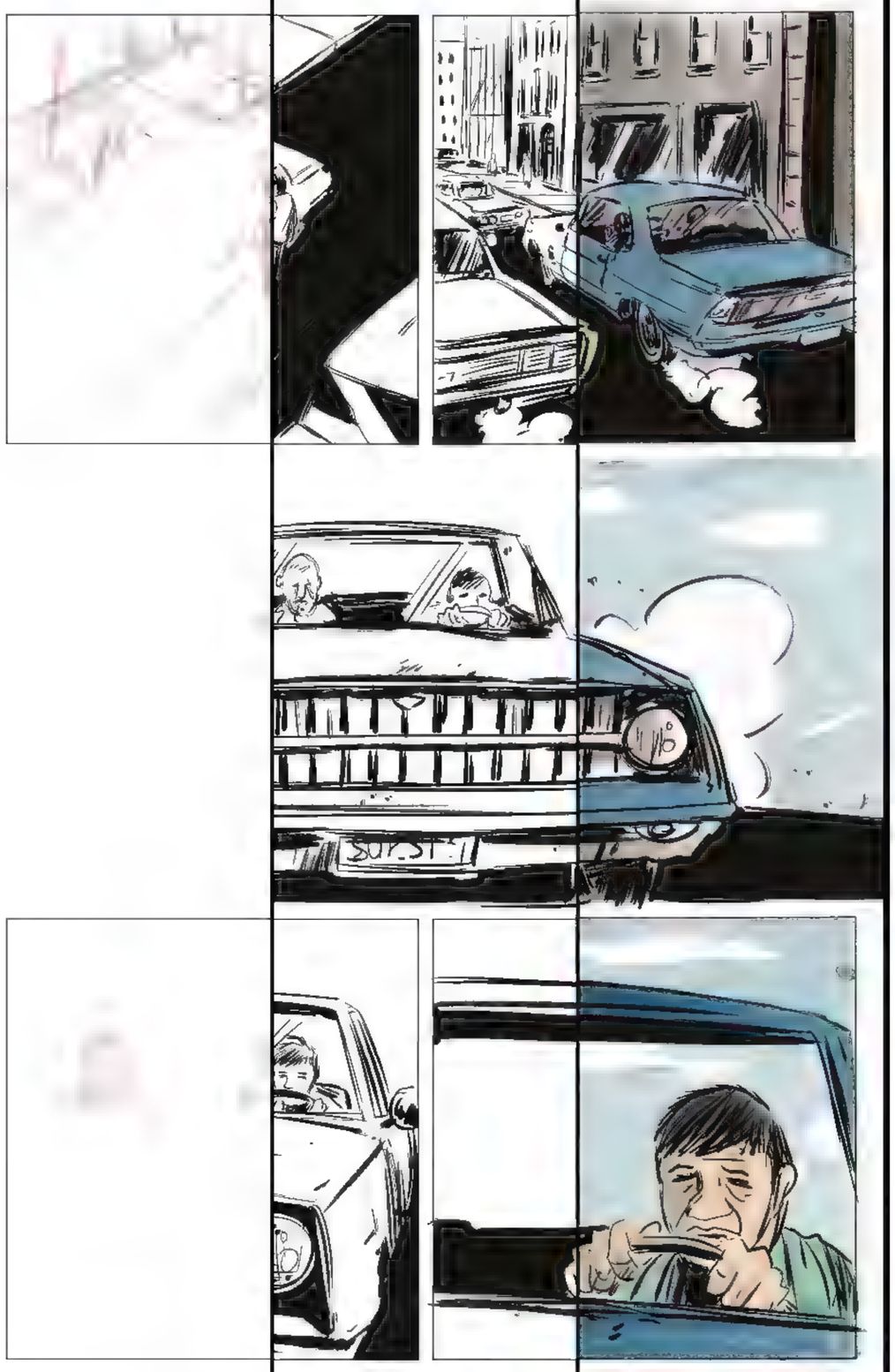
I used a series of four-tier panels here to slow down the rhythm of the story in the present day. Sharlene's use of color here is great. Leeching the color from the characters and shifting it to the background . . . to contrast the colorful versions of these same characters in the flashbacks.

This is where those early quiet pages pay off. Sharlene's use of color set all of this up so that the sound effects really pop on this page, and we get the feeling that our hero here is overwhelmed. Comics can't do sound—but it can do a really interesting job of visually representing the emotional impact of sound.

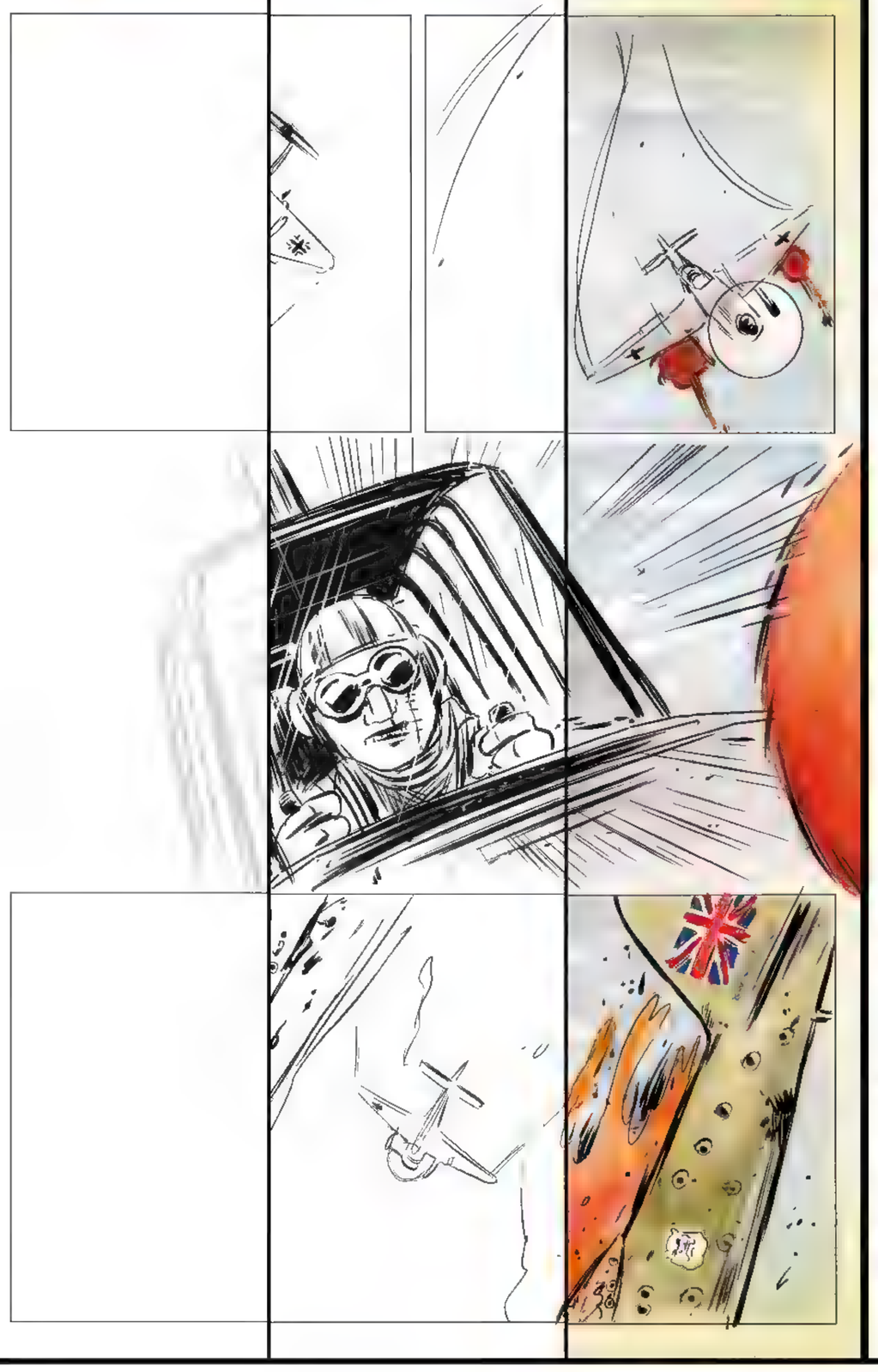
Interesting side note—early on, Jeff and Ray decided to switch the race of the lead heroes. It seems obvious now, but it was such a good idea—it changes everything about the story without being overt. As a result, all the characters had to be re-colored for issue 1 and 2.

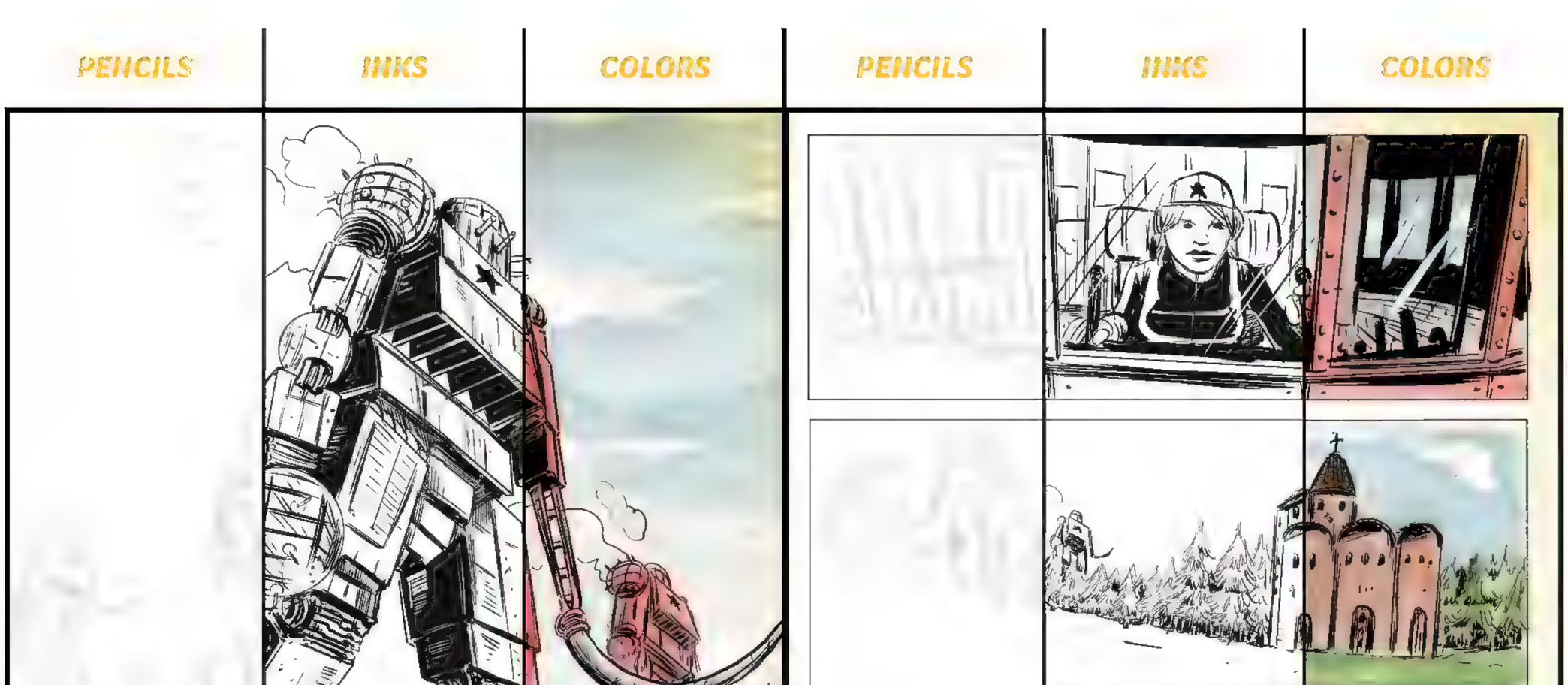
Finally we're getting to the planes! So much fun to draw. All props to Alex Toth and Joe Kubert on their amazing work—*Enemy Ace* was definitely one of my touchstones as well.

PENCILS INKS COLORS PENCILS INKS COLORS



PENCILS INKS COLORS PENCILS INKS COLORS





This is the heart of the story—or at least the stuff I was most excited to draw. I've literally **never** drawn a mech before and to design one on top of it . . . was a lot of work. I tried to evoke Russia but also make it something that could exist with World War II technology. The joints are supposed to be working like tank tracks and gears, and the head is inspired by the US bombers with their canopies and guns mounted inside of them.

Bending the horizon here in the last panel to give the scene some movement—and keep it from being too static.

Planes in silhouette is something that Toth and Kubert taught me. But what they didn't have is Sharlene doing the amazing sunsets in the background. I figured this out when I was working with Sharlene on *Dept. H*. The more empty space I can give her, the more magic she can work with watercolor. It's tough as a penciler/inker—the instinct is to fill all of the space with detail. It feels lazy sometimes. But the benefit is that color can do a lot of the heavy lifting if you just let it.

Mechs on the march! And airplanes flying. Some of my favorite pages. The great thing is that while I used a **lot** of reference for the early pages of this issue—I'd never drawn WWII airplanes before—by the end of this issue I could draw them without looking at anything. Practice makes perfect.

I love this story beat that the guys wrote. Quick shots of each of our main characters . . . all intent and intense . . . flying toward each other. Great way to end the issue.

My favorite page of the issue. I felt like the top panel needed to be heavy—solid blacks—which doesn't give Sharlene anything to work with . . . but that heavy panel will be floating above the one below it—

THE QUANTUM AGE™

SKETCHBOOK

NOTES BY WILFREDO TORRES

ARCHIVE

Archive was the first character I sketched out. The two original ideas were pretty close to what ended up with as his final look. I was shooting for a cross between silver age comics and 50s sci-fi space suits. Jeff liked the idea of the lab coat but wanted a longer cylindrical shape for his "brain dome," and that's where we ended up on the final.

DARK HORSE COMICS ART BOARD
TITLE: QUANTUM AGE ISSUE: ARTIST: MOWLES PAGE:
ALL "BLEED" ART MUST EXTEND TO THIS OUTERMOST DOTTED LINE
TRIM MARKS INDICATE WHERE A PAGE IS CUT TO SIZE
ALL LETTERING AND ESSENTIAL ART MUST FALL WITH IN THIS SOLID "LIVE AREA" BUT THIS IS THE BORDER FOR A STANDARD, NON BLEED COMIC BOOK PAGE

TO CREATE TWO PAGE SPREAD, CUT ONE BOARD ALONG ITS RIGHT HAND TRIM (INDICATED BY BLACK CROP MARKS), AND CUT ANOTHER BOARD ALONG ITS LEFT HAND TRIM. BUTT CUT EDGES TOGETHER, TAPE ON BACK
FOR ART THAT WILL BE REPRODUCED FROM PENCIL ONLY, DRAW ON THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS BOARD AND INK IN TRIM MARKS IN BLACK.

Barbaliteen's disguised human form seemed like something that needed to be very practical and designed to blend in, so I kept it pretty basic and utilitarian.

The first draft of the militia soldiers was way too current looking. I wanted the look to be recognizable without being too grounded but also not pushed so far that it seemed so outlandish that it wouldn't be practical for actual street level use.

GORILLA GIRL

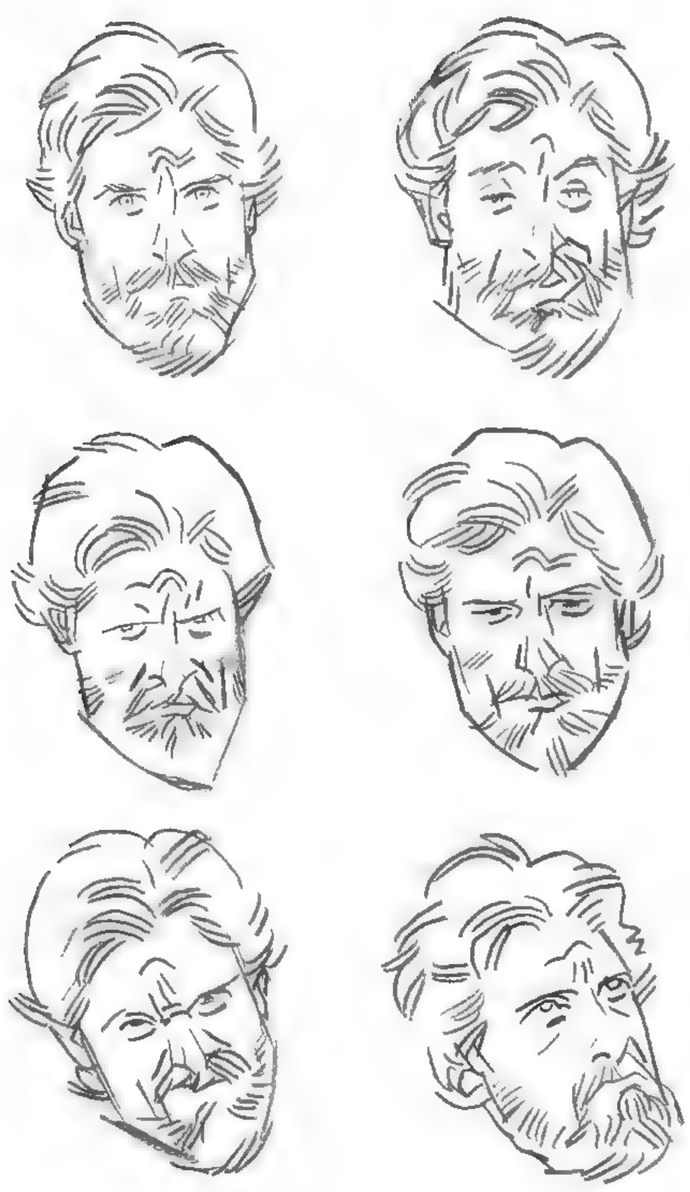
Very early on, Jeff asked what sorts of elements of comics I enjoyed and I told him that I missed comic book gorillas and also dinosaurs. When I got the character list, Jeff had included Gorilla Girl into the Quantum League. I didn't know to what extent she would be included in the script so I even started trying to figure out an older version of the character, kind of a gorilla valkyrie. I also got to draw some dinosaurs.

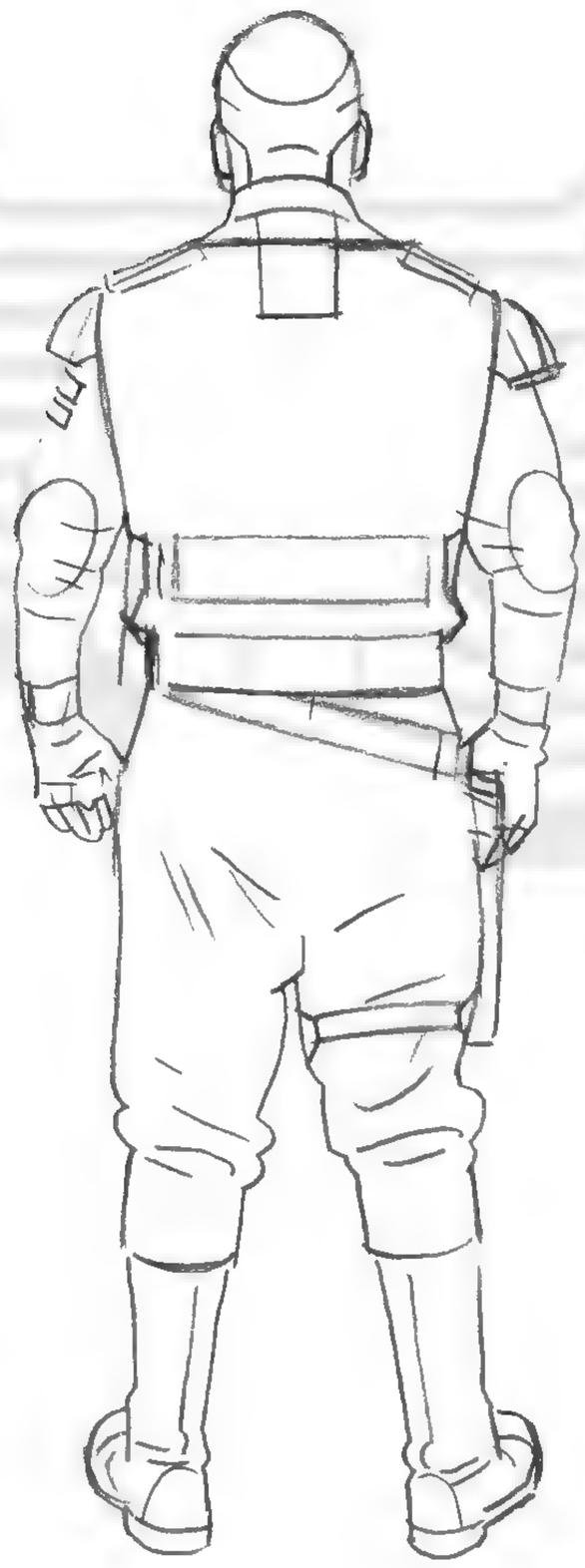
FURNACE LAD

Furnace Lad kinda popped into my head fully formed, a sort of fire elf type guy. The real gag with him had we seen him in action would have been in how his abilities translated visually.

COLONEL WEIRD

By the time we catch up to Colonel Weird in *Quantum*, I saw him as someone who was far more powerful than what we'd seen before and much more in control of that power. I tend to overthink everything and when you're working on a guy who can cross time, space, and dimensions there's a lot to exploit there. But my general line of thought was "How many times has he lived this moment in time?" Is this the first time he's doing this and his reactions are genuine, or is it the hundredth and he's just going through the motions because he knows that no matter what he does the result remains the same?

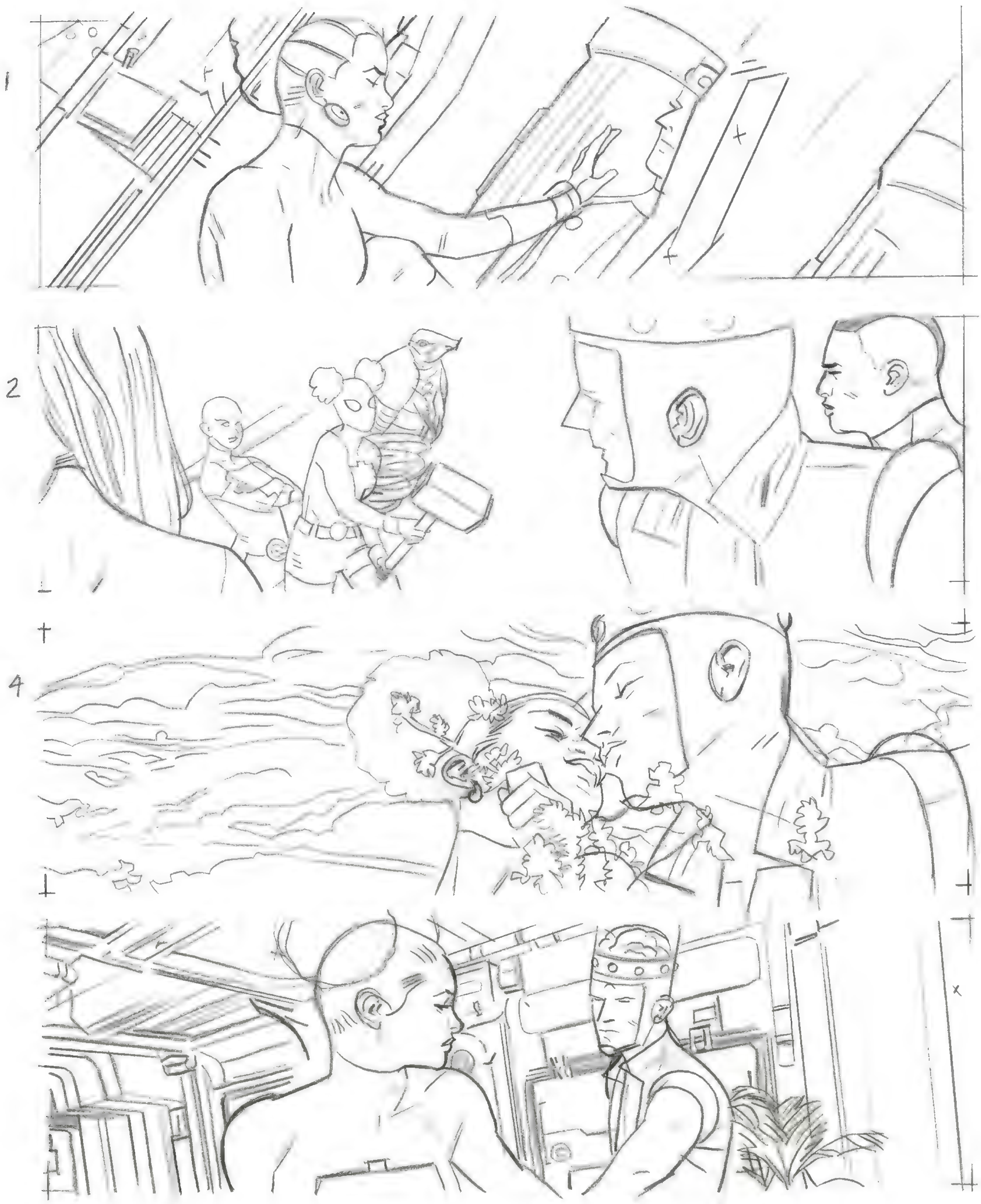




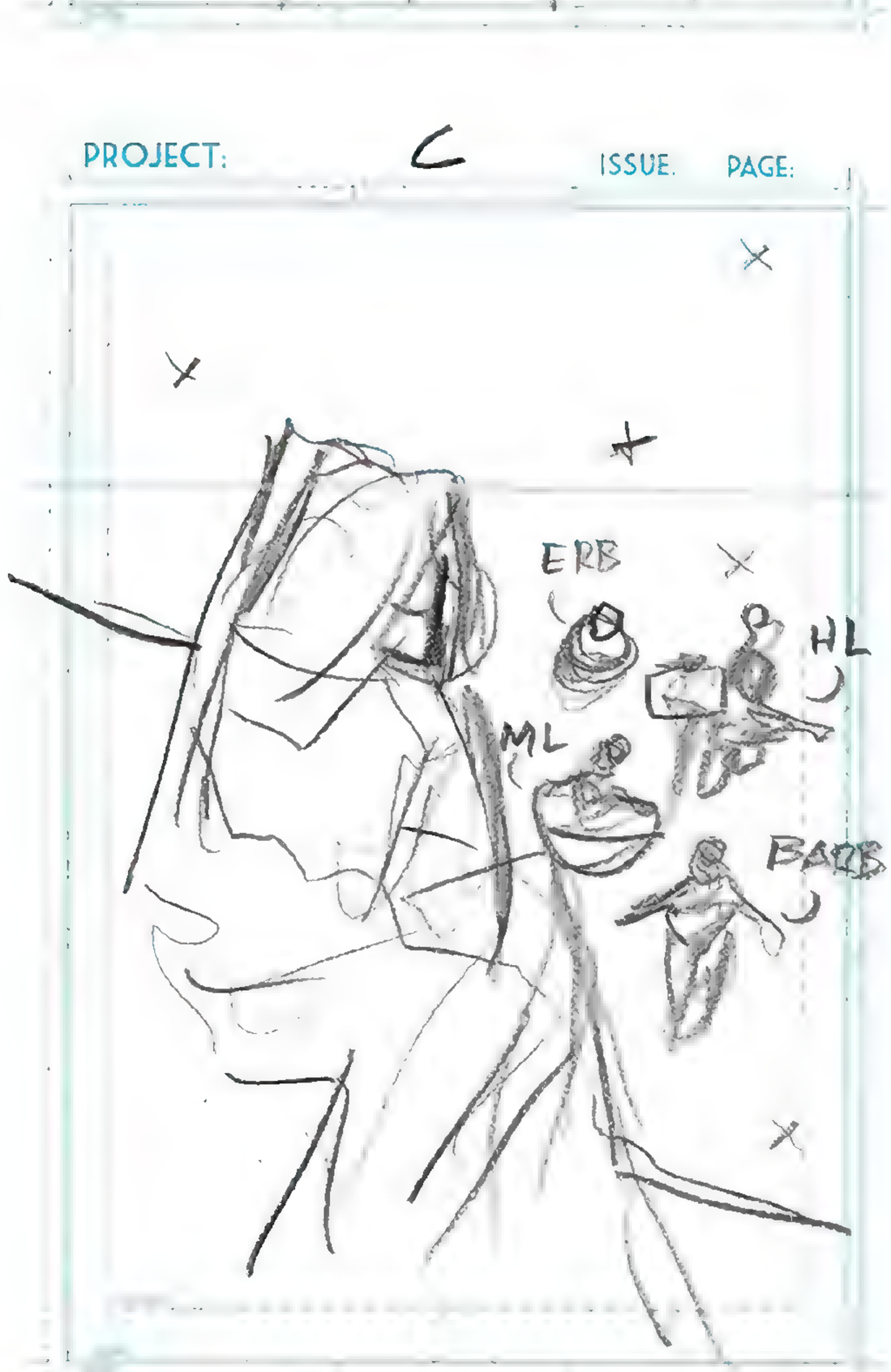
The final take on the human militia guards was a middle ground between what we would see from modern day tactical gear and what we might find in a distant but not unrecognizable future.

When I was designing the cover for the first issue, I wanted to have something that reflected the current state of affairs but that also spoke to what had come before. Barbaliteen is pretty much the reader's guide to this world so it made sense to start right where we first find him, hiding and on the run. In this instance it was very literally backed up by a simplified, almost propagandized idea of what the Quantum League was.

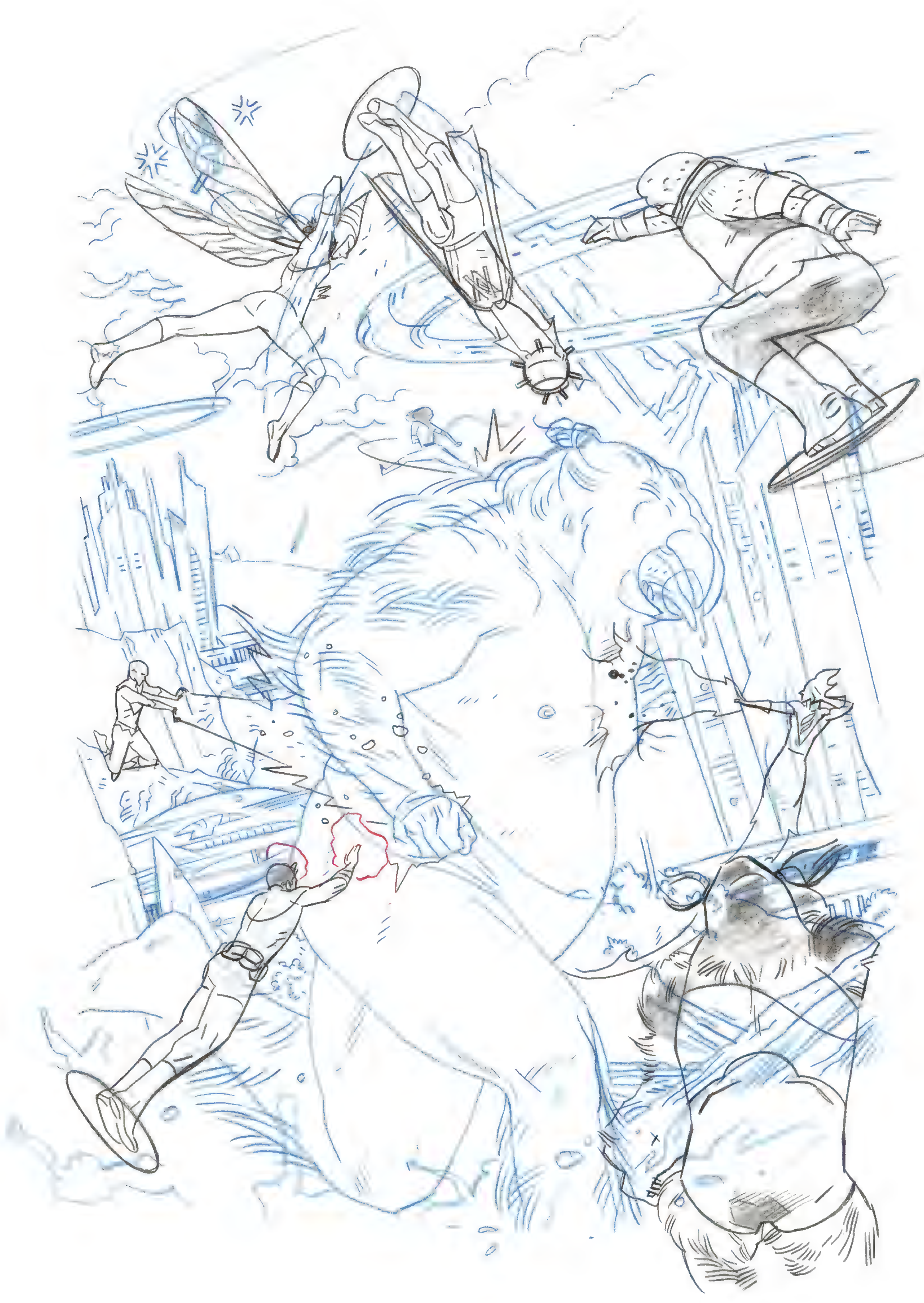
THE QUANTUM AGE 1 WOWIES. 00



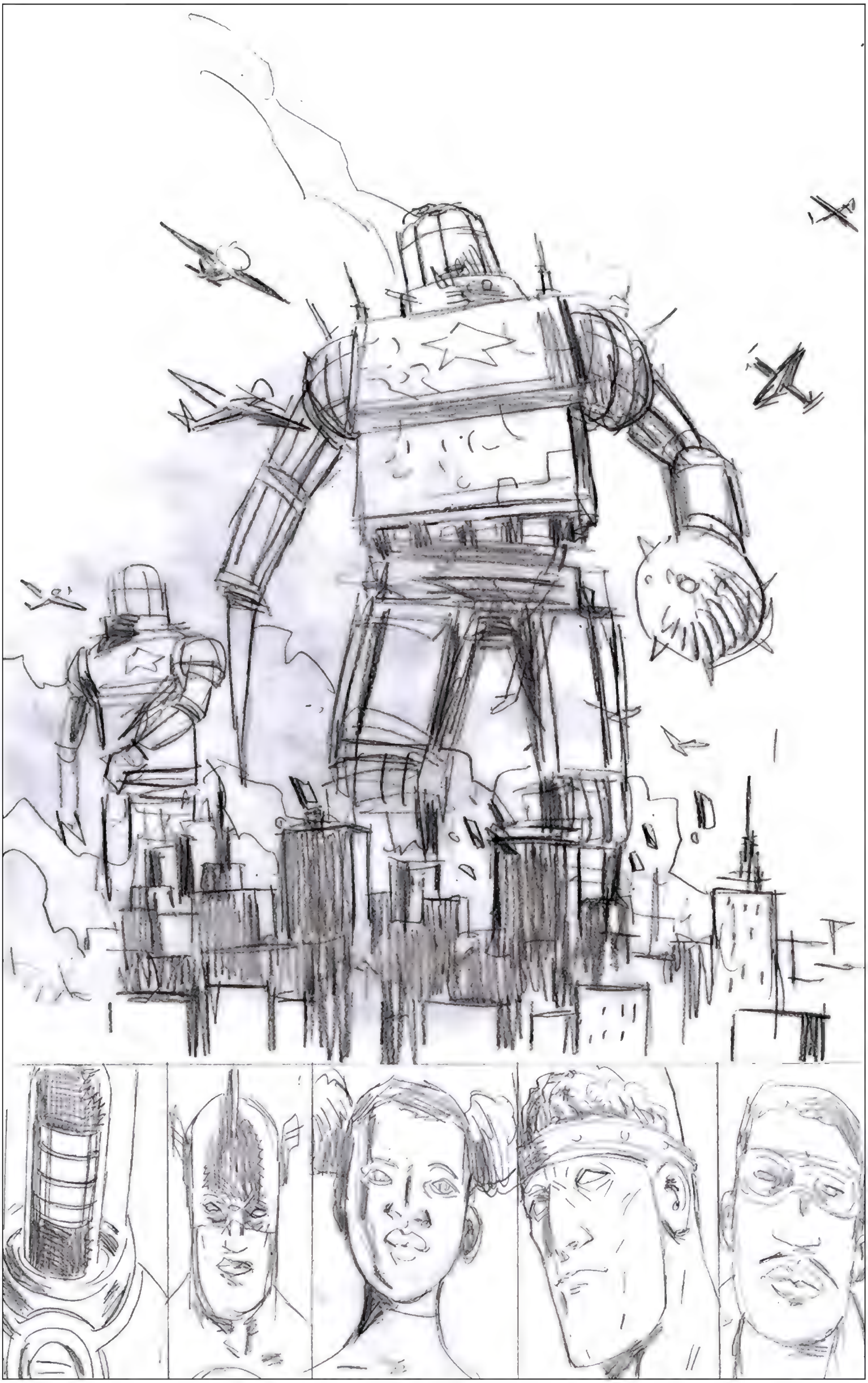
I'll often draw specific elements or panels on a separate sheet so that I can resize or arrange them more easily before moving forward to the final inks on a page. The Hammer Lass/Archive flashback sequences from Issue #4 were actually the first thing I pencilled on that issue because I had a clear idea of what I wanted them to look like before I even started in on the thumbnails.



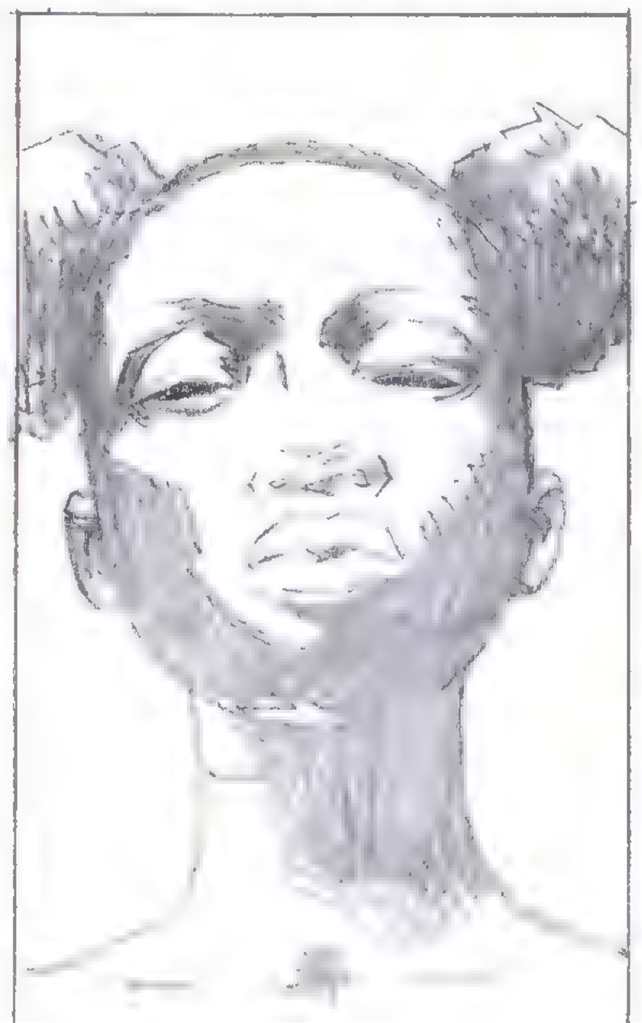
We wanted to feature Chronokus on the cover to Issue #5 without revealing his identity, so all of the preliminary thumbnails were geared in that direction. We also wanted to include a group shot which is how we ended up on the final cover.

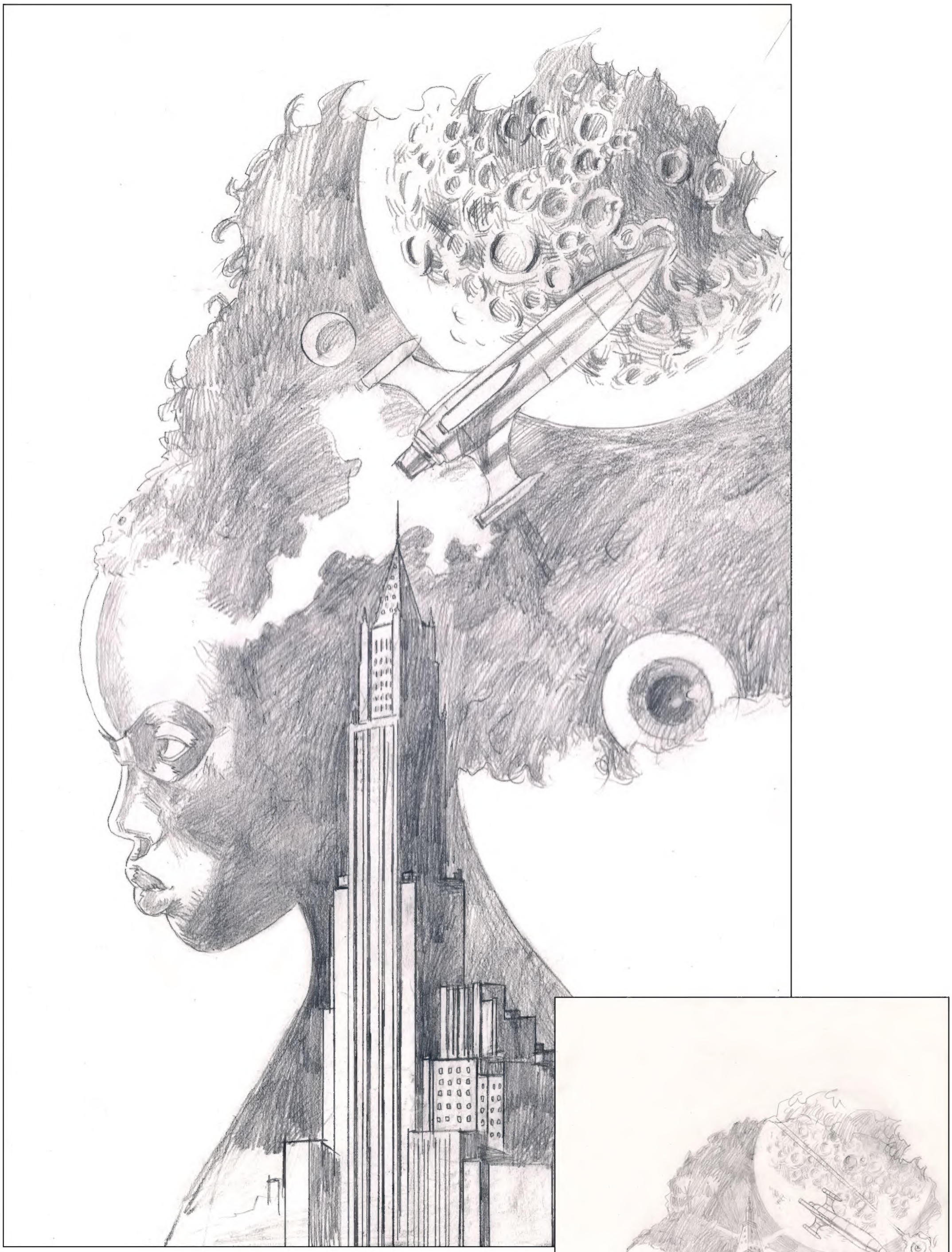


I don't even know, man—Jeff wanted a big action shot of the Quantum League fighting a monster so I drew a giant alien were-sloth sumo wrestler because it seemed like the right thing to do. Again drawn on a separate sheet so that I could figure out how to place and size it on the final page.



This and following page: Process work for *The World of Black Hammer Library Edition* volume 2 cover by Dean Ormston.





This page: Process work for *Black Hammer Library Edition* volume 2 cover by Dean Ormston

JEFF LEMIRE is the award winning, *New York Times*–bestselling author of such graphic novels as *Essex County*, *Sweet Tooth*, *Underwater Welder*, and *Roughneck*, as well as cocreator of *Descender* with Dustin Nguyen, *Black Hammer* with Dean Ormston, *Plutona* with Emi Lenox, and *Gideon Falls* with Andrea Sorrentino.

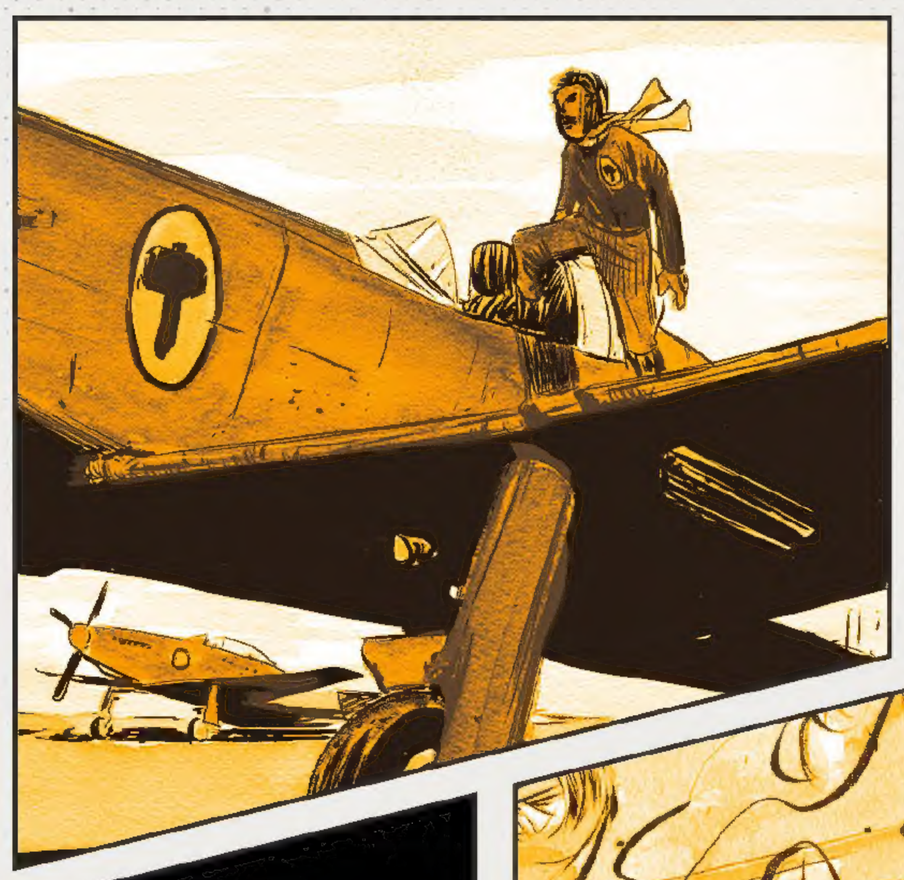
He also collaborated with celebrated musician Gord Downie on the graphic novel and album *The Secret Path*, which was made into an animated film in 2016. Jeff has won numorous awards including an Eisner Award, a Canadian Screen Award, and a Juno Award. Jeff has also written extensively for both Marvel and DC Comics.

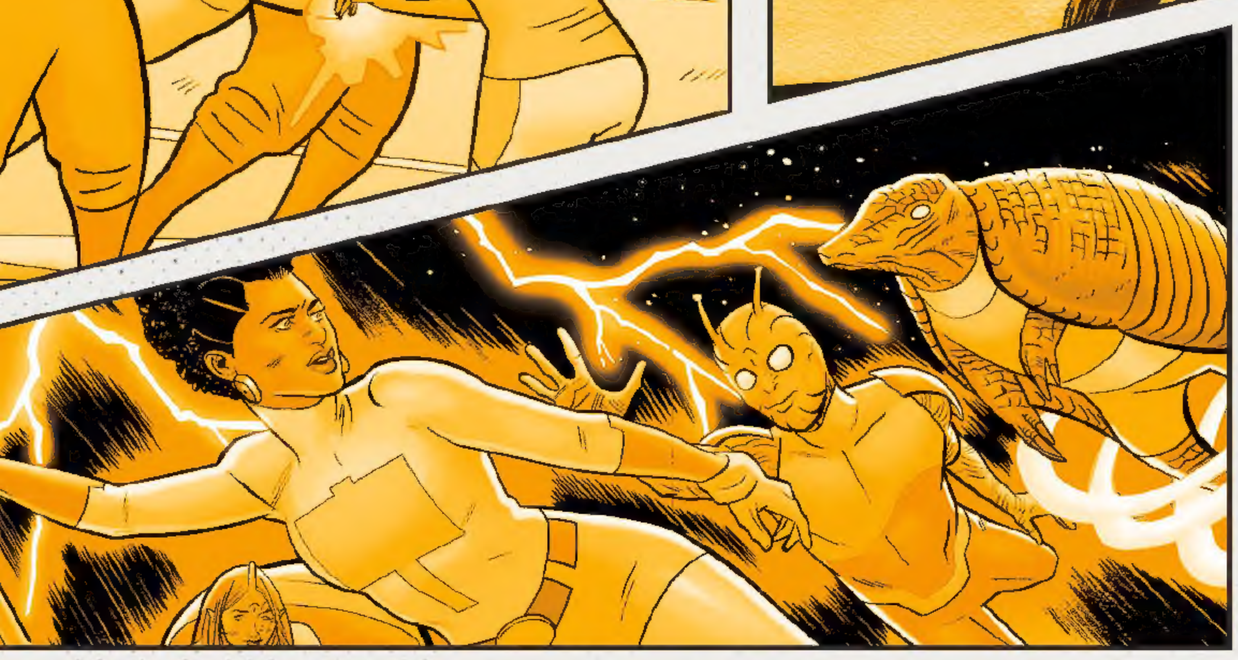
Many of Jeff's book are in active development for Film or TV, including *Essex County*, *Underwater Welder*, *Plutona*, *Gideon Falls*, *Descender*, *Family Tree*, and the *Black Hammer* universe at Legendary Entertainment with Lemire attached as screenwriter and executive producer.

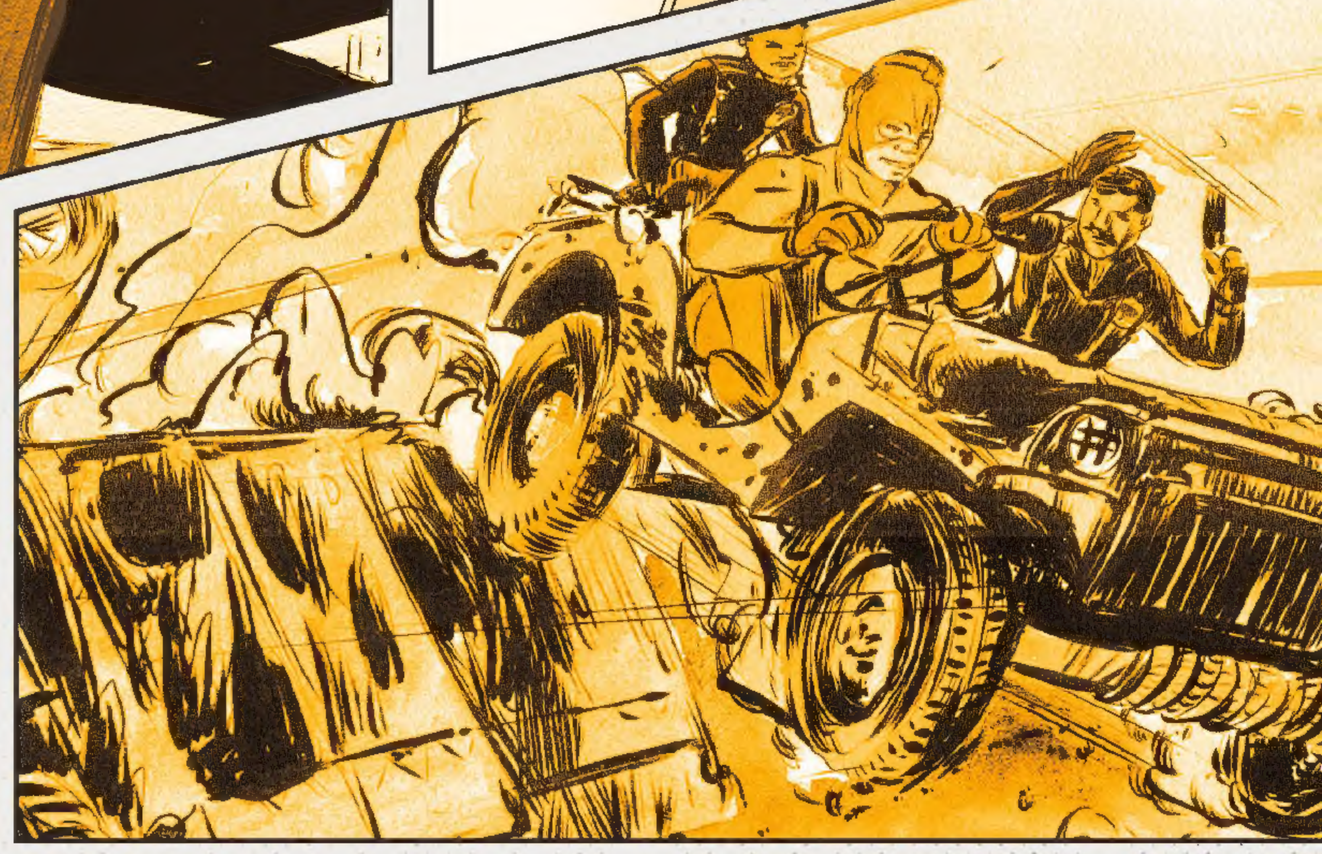
Lemire's *Sweet Tooth* is currently being adapted into a Netflix series produced by Robert Downey Jr., set to be released in early 2021.

DEAN ORMSTON is a British illustrator who entered comics with *Judge Dredd Megazine* and *2000 AD* before moving onto work with Vertigo on *Sandman* with Neil Gaiman, *Lucifer* and *The Unwritten* with Mike Carey, *The Eaters* with Peter Milligan, *House of Secrets* with Steven T. Seagle, *Book of Magic* and *Bodies* with Si Spencer, and *Northlanders* with Brian Wood. He is currently working on his Eisner Award–winning series *Black Hammer* with Jeff Lemire.

AN EXPANDED LOOK AT THE PAST AND FUTURE OF JEFF LEMIRE AND DEAN ORMSTON'S EISNER AWARD–WINNING *BLACK HAMMER* UNIVERSE, WITH TWO COMPLETE SERIES DRAWN BY MATT KINDT AND WILFREDO TORRES!







During the Golden Age of superheroes, an elite Air Force crew called the Black Hammer Squadron bands together to combat the Nazis, a host of occult threats, and their ultimate aerial warrior the Ghost Hunter.

Far in the future of *Black Hammer*, a collection of superheroes, inspired by the legendary heroes of Black Hammer Farm, must band together to save the planet from an authoritarian regime.

Collects *Black Hammer '45* and *The Quantum Age* in a deluxe, oversized hardcover format with a new cover, sketchbook extras, and more!

BLACK HAMMER '45

5/5 —*IMPULSE GAMER* **5/5** —*MONKEYS FIGHTING ROBOTS* **5/5** —*COMICBOOK.COM*

THE QUANTUM AGE

5/5 —*COMIC CRUSADERS* **5/5** —*POP CULT HQ* **9/10** —*MULTIVERISTY COMICS*

DARK HORSE BOOKS

SON OF ULTRON

"THIS FAN... THIS MONSTER!"